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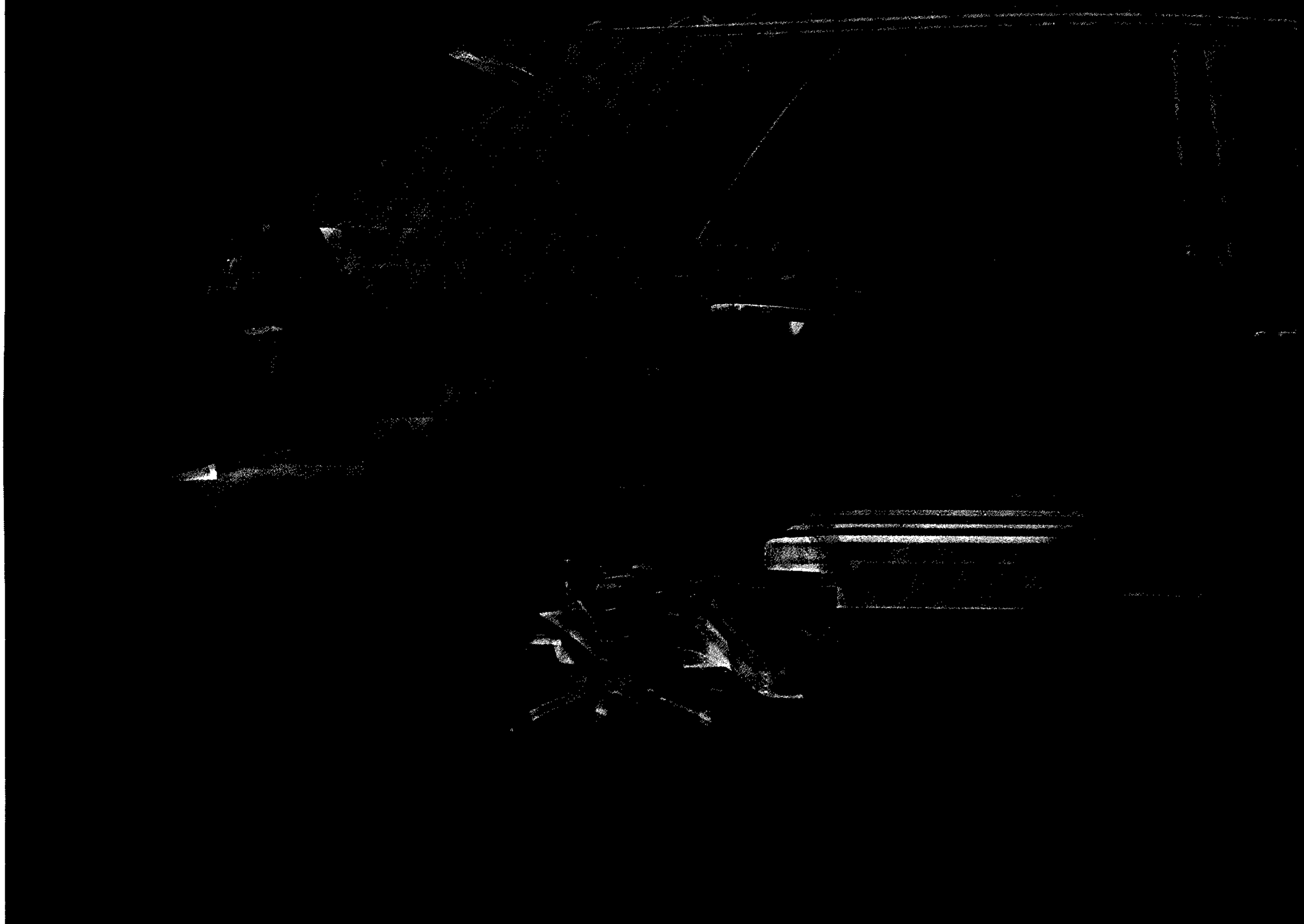

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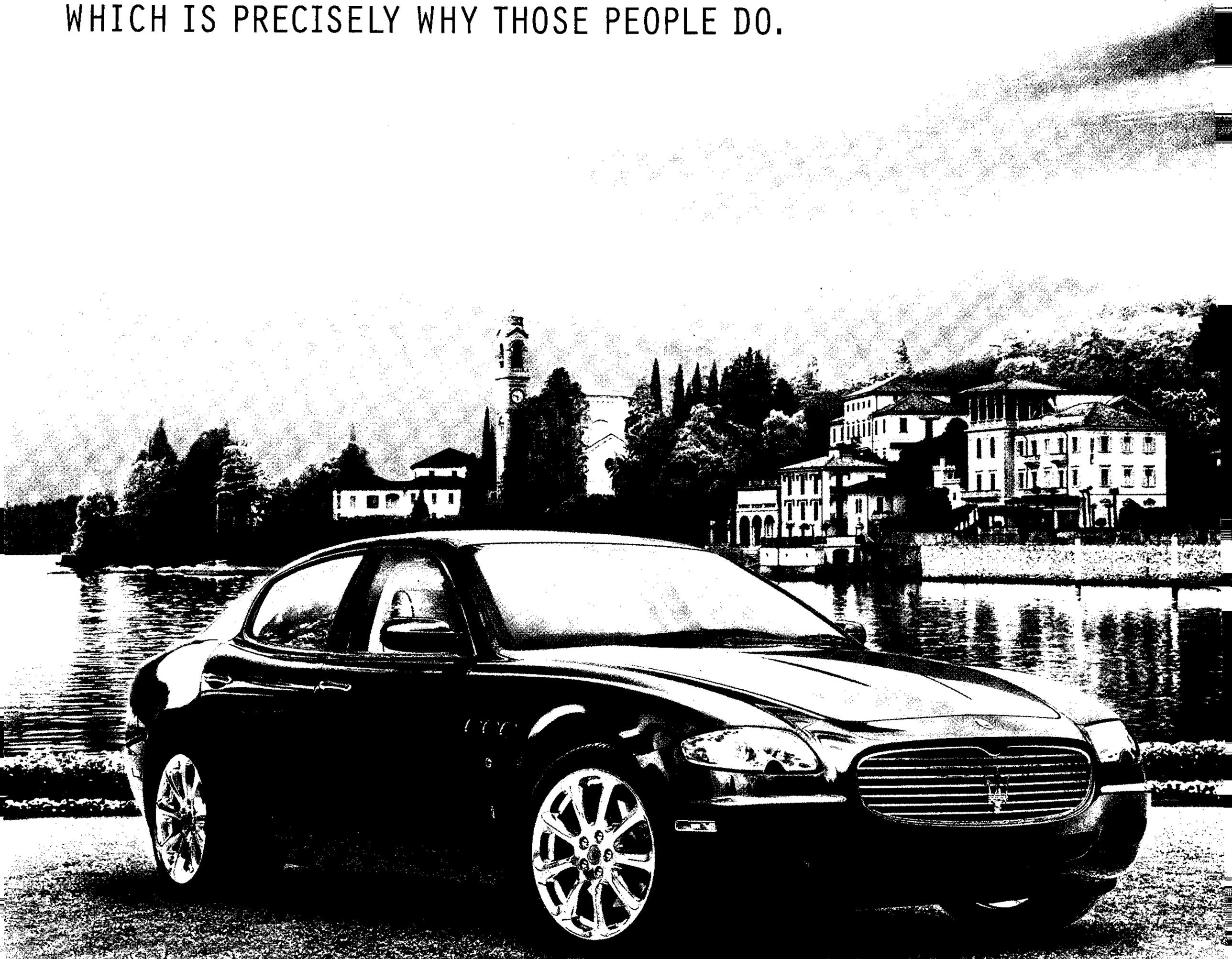

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Not to be sniffed at

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"WE WILL not cut and run when faced with this violence," announced defence secretary John Reid, trying to turn the successful rescue of two British soldiers from an Iranian-backed militia in Basra into a handy "Zulu moment" just before the Labour party conference.

In fact neither he nor anyone else at the ministry of defence had anything to do with the rescue. The decision to go was taken by Brigadier John Lorimer, acting without any support, his own commanding officer being away on holiday at the time.

The MoD had very little to say about the action for a full 24 hours, denying key details of the breaking story until convinced that it had been a success. Meanwhile Lorimer was acting on his own initiative, fully aware that he would have been the fall guy if the operation had gone "belly up".

Once it was clear that there had been no mass casualties and no footage of SAS hostages being beheaded live on video, however, the MoD re-assumed control of the story.

It announced grandly that our lads had shown "restraint" in their limited use of fire power. In fact squaddies in Basra say they are now so terrified of the possible legal consequences of using their weapons that they hesitate to do so, allowing the mob in this case to get close enough to shower them with petrol bombs.

The MoD also announced that the British had been attacked by "a small but violent crowd". But those on the ground say the police station in question was home to hundreds of militia men, who fled only when British armour arrived. They left behind looted Mercedes and Lexus cars – all gleefully crushed under the tracks of British tanks.

The MoD also said that "the situation in Basra is now calm" but the problem is actually that the British army has been involved in a major operation for some time now not just against Iranian-backed insurgents but also Iranian militia themselves.

GCHQ, Britain's secret listening post in Cheltenham, like the rest of the security services needs to recruit new staff to tackle the mounting threat of terrorism.

But it is in danger of driving away its existing highly-trained specialists – mathematicians, linguists, scientists, code breakers and the like – by expecting them to take pay cuts to fund the extra staff.

Civil service pay never compares well with industry, so to try to keep the best specialists onboard, GCHQ pays its boffins "R and R", or recruitment and retention, bonuses. It now intends to axe these, which could reduce the pay and pension packages of some by up to 30 percent. The cuts follow a three-year pay deal which already froze some salaries.

In effect GCHQ staff are being asked to pay the price for one of the biggest PFI cock-ups in this government's impressive run of cocked-up PFIs. GCHQ squandered hundreds of millions on its disastrous PFI move to new (and far too small) premises outside Cheltenham, with all the predictable IT problems and some others for good measure.

A scathing public accounts committee (PAC) report listed the failures, which raised costs by nearly £400m more than estimates.

THE widower of murdered Nottingham jeweller Marian Bates summed up the feelings of many of those bereaved following failings by large organisations in his reaction to the probation inspectorate's damning report into events leading up to his wife's death: "Everybody is incompetent, but nobody is to blame. How can that be?"

The report revealed that much of the responsibility for his wife's murder lay at the door of the firm running the tagging service, Premier Monitoring. The company had repeatedly failed to report one of the killer's breaches of his probation licence, including the removal of his electronic tag.

Premier is part of the giant service provider Serco, which receives hundreds of millions of pounds from the taxpayer for work in defence, health, education and prison services, to name but four areas. Naturally the government is keen to protect the firm's reputation, as the *Eastern Daily Press* exposed starkly after it received emails between the firm and the home office, attached in error to a company press release.

In one, a home office official tells Serco director Andy Homer: "We think you need to start with something like, 'Premier Monitoring (or Serco?) would like to extend their sympathy to Mr Bates for the loss of his wife in such tragic circumstances'." Unsurprisingly the final version refers to Premier, with Serco's name then conveniently absent from national press reports.

Mention of Serco's role in the scandal would have put a dampener on a great month for the firm. Two weeks earlier it had announced profits up 22 percent on the back of yet more public sector work, even though the company's vast repertoire of skills clearly doesn't extend to. responding to foul-ups that cost lives.

PS: The *EDP* established from the home office that writing press releases in this way is "entirely usual". So now you know: when a private contractor responds to a tragic failure in running a public service, it's probably stitched it up with the government first.

EDITORIAL
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Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ .
Distributed by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC

Number crunchings

£6,000

■ Maximum amount paid so far in compensation to those injured in the London terrorist bombings

£30,000

■ Amount paid out by the *Sun* to wife of London terrorist bomber for exclusive interview

BLAIR EXIT STRATEGY

Street of Shame

WHY, since Kate Moss has been happily admitting to taking drugs in interviews since at least 1999, did the papers choose this month to suddenly notice?

It has not helped that Moss has spent most of the past year in the company of a crack addict who, as the *Eye* noted in February, supports his habit – as do most of his entourage – by flogging stories and pictures to the tabloids about his and his girlfriend's latest exploits. But the model's real mistake was in taking legal action against the *Sunday Mirror* for its story that she had "collapsed into a drug-induced coma in Barcelona in 2001 after taking vast quantities of cocaine".

While the "vast quantities" part was, as Moss would put it herself, "bang-on", other details were erroneous enough for the paper to have to publish a prominent apology on 31 July, pointing out that it had paid Moss "substantial damages and costs for distress and embarrassment caused".

While Moss's windfall no doubt quickly disappeared up her nose, the Mirror Group's short-term memory is still fully functional, and it is no accident that it was in the *Daily Mirror* that cameraphone snaps from one of Doherty's recording sessions showing the model mid-snort appeared only a few weeks later.

Even then, however, the *Mirror* appeared to be unsure what to make of Moss's lifestyle. While the front four pages of the paper on 15 September were filled with grainy pictures of her "debauched drugs and drink session", over on page 36 hackette Caroline Cook was on hand with advice on how to "steal the style" of the "undisputed queen of boho… to get that stunningly chic Mossy look simply follow our magnificent seven tips".

FOLLOWING the outing of "Cocaine Kate", hacks at the London *Evening Standard* were eager to use the launch of London Fashion Week to reveal more stories of flagrant drug-taking by the capital's fashionistas.

Undercover reporters took swabs from the lavatories of four of the week's biggest parties and all tested positive for cocaine. The paper used this research to lambast the fashion industry for its drug abuse, describing cocaine use as "rife" at the Fashion Week parties.

Of course an occasion such as London Fashion Week would be nothing without generous support from a high-profile sponsor. And which company dares support such a scandal-ridden event? Why, step forward the London *Evening Standard*.

THE latest evidence of the work and pensions secretary's burgeoning insanity came with his declaration to Jonathan Dimbleby that "I am an honest man" and "I do my absolute best to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth".

As the *Observer* recently revealed, just before the damning report by Alan Budd last December into Blunkett's efforts to secure a visa for his lover Kimberly Quinn's nanny, the paper received a call claiming that the home secretary was merely a "working class lad who's the voice of ordinary people", and that he had been victim of an orchestrated campaign by an "American millionairess".

The paper went ahead and wrote a story based on the call, which it said had been made by a "friend" of Blunkett – only for the Labour party press office to issue an official denial, claiming that "neither David Blunkett nor anyone who speaks with his authority has said this".

When the paper threatened to release the tape recording it had of the conversation, however, the party withdrew this statement – as well it might, since (although the *Observer* continues to keep this fact off the record as it agreed), the voice on the tape was that of Blunkett himself.

It appears Blunkett has learned at least one lesson from the incident – although it certainly wasn't not to lie. When the *Mirror* splashed this week with the news of his new relationship with a 29-year-old blonde he had met in Annabel's nightclub prior to her split with her fiancé, and quoted his insistence that "it is a platonic friendship and I am entitled to a private life", Blunkett immediately announced that he had "recorded that interview and I never said that and I will be taking the *Mirror* to the Press Council".

While the *Observer*'s experience suggests that the tape could actually contain just about anything, it is unlikely that Blunkett's complaint will come to anything (and not merely because the Press Council was abolished in 1990). The words he objects to were actually said by a spokesman three days previously to the *Daily Mail*, and merely quoted by the *Mirror* quite separately from the lengthy interview it conducted itself with Mr Blunkett – but by now he has probably convinced himself that he has never spoken to any newspapers at all.

THE DÉTENTE following the July bombings between the office of London mayor Ken Livingstone and his arch enemy, the *Evening Standard*, was bound to be shortlived.

After the *Standard* wrongly accused a Muslim bookshop-keeper of peddling hatred, Ken's team used the September issue of *The Londoner* freesheet to take the *Standard* to task, demanding an apology and an article to set the matter straight.

Staff at the Dar Al Taqwa bookshop, near Baker Street, have received threatening and abusive phone calls ever since the *Standard* published its address and phone number in its "Terror and hatred for sale in central London" article on 28 July.

Dar Al Taqwa, owned by Samir El-Attar, has sold books on the Qur'an, Arabic and travel to Londoners for more than 20 years, but none of the extremist books or videos pictured next to a photo of the shop has ever been sold on the premises. Mr El-Attar even points out that one of the items pictured was actually a DVD of an *anti*-terrorism lecture by Dr Zakir Naik.

The *Standard* has so far refused to run an apology, but it did print a clarification that "the videos and books pictured with the article" had never been on sale at Dar Al Taqwa.

DESPITE transforming the *Sunday Telegraph* into the *Sunday Hellograph* in record time, editor Sarah Sands isn't resting on her laurels.

Further glossification must be pursued. As she tells staff at the *Sun Tel* magazine, it's easy to achieve: "Just think 'glam, glam, GLAM!'"

IS THE imminent departure of *Grauniad* executive editor Albert Scardino by any chance related to his hiring of trainee hack Dilpazier Aslam, who was recently dismissed for not declaring his membership of an Islamist group?

Emphatically not, according to editor Alan Rusbridger, who explains that Scardino – husband of Pearson Group boss Dame Marjorie Scardino – is leaving in October "to pursue online and entertainment projects. We wish him well for the future."

If his last "entertainment project" is any guide, he'll need all the good wishes he can get. In 2000 Scardino led a £2.3m takeover of Notts County FC, the oldest team in the football league, and installed himself as chairman. His ambition seemed limitless, as the club started luring new players with lavish salaries in the hope of winning promotion to the first division.

Alas! Scardino had financed the deal with loans which he thought the local council would guarantee. But no such guarantee was agreed and he soon fell behind with repayments. Meanwhile, the extravagant spending schemes of Scardino and his chief executive Peter Storrie sent the club into a financial spiral. In June 2002 it was declared insolvent, with debts of £7m.

Scardino said this was "the first step on the road to recovery", claiming that he would have a rescue deal in place by August. But it turned out to be a very long step indeed. The club remained in administration for 18 months, sometimes being within hours of going under completely before a consortium of fans and local tycoons bailed it out.

Followers of the Magpies have neither forgiven nor forgotten the "suicidal reign" of Scardino and Storrie. The fans' website describes them as "an infantile pair of little boys playing big business at the expense of this club's great history". If any other football teams receive approaches from the former *Grauniad* executive in the next few months, they can't say they haven't been warned.

AS THE pre-launch excitement at the revamped *grauniad* reached fever pitch (for four executives and Alan Rusbridger, anyway) the paper's marketing team decided to run a series of ever-so clever double-page ads in the trade press (*Campaign Marketing, Marketing Week,* etc).

"*The*End", they proclaimed, against a blank background and in the same type as the *Guardian*'s old masthead. The ads also ran in the paper itself.

Over at Wapping wags in the *Times'* marketing department thought it would be hilarious to run spoiler ads in the trade press a week later, spoofing the valedictions but saying "not the end" instead. So when Robert Thomson opened last week's *Campaign* anticipating a coup for his paper on the opening spread, imagine his surprise to discover that *Campaign* had run the wrong one – not only had the *Times* wheeze fallen flat, but the new *grauniad* got a welcome present from its rival in the form of a free double-page ad.

ON TUESDAY 20 September the *Independent* published its second 48-page supplement in its two-part series, Your Planet and How You Can Save It.

It included the advice: "AVOID UNNECESSARY PACKAGING WHEN SHOPPING… This will not only reduce the amount of waste leaving your home but will save the resources and pollution involved in manufacturing unnecessary packaging in the first place. Your spending power also communicates itself to the manufacturers, who will see that there is a market for 'less wrapped' products."

Wise words indeed… completely ignored. The very next day when the *Indy* was distributed in colour printed, non-biodegradable plastic bags, each containing a small chocolate bar.

Post-gladitorial sports interviews

"More T2 vicar?"

"If you don't stop playing truant, you'll never be able to drop out of college"

Number crunchings

49 ■ Articles in British press in last week about Bob Dylan

48 ■ Average age of British newspaper editors

SIX months ago, the *Mail on Sunday* was as full of loathing for Mark Thatcher as anyone else capable of rational thought. He had, the paper reported, "been humiliatingly banned by George Bush from setting foot in America" in a "new shame" that would be a "devastating blow" to his mother. "It will inevitably prompt fresh speculation that Sir Mark's 17-year marriage could collapse", reported the paper gleefully.

Last weekend, however, with its theory proved correct, the paper was curiously muted. "The new love in the life of Sir Mark Thatcher is the glamorous wife of a leading London property consultant", trilled hack Dominic Turnbull in a soft-soaping reminiscent of the glory days of Nigel Pratt-Dumpster. "The *Mail on Sunday* can reveal that Sir Mark has formed a close relationship with Lady Francis Russell, the wife of the uncle of the Duke of Bedford."

Whence this sudden enthusiasm? As Turnbull went on to reveal, "she is the sister of Viscountess Rothermere, the wife of Viscount Rothermere, chairman of the Daily Mail and General Trust." Whatever coups he might foment in future and no matter how many times he breaks his mother's heart, Scratcher can from now on presumably be assured an easy ride from the *Mail on Sunday.*

MORE evidence of the new Berliner-size *Grauniad*'s move away from "taking comfort in political positioning". On 15 September the Stop the War coalition presented Downing Street with an open letter demanding the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq by the end of the year, with 100 high-profile signatories including such *Grauniad*-friendly names as Ken Loach, Anita Roddick, Benjamin Zephaniah, Harold Pinter, Richard Dawkins, Tony Woodley and Billy Bragg.

Reasoning that the paper had generously covered their activities in the past, organisers offered the paper exclusive use of their letter on the morning that Brian Eno and Julie Christie delivered it to No. 10. The paper's letters editor declined to print it – though he did find room for four missives from readers praising their redesign and the decision to reinstate the Doonesbury cartoon.

BLACKWATCH

CONRAD BLACK's dwindling band of allies became even smaller last week, as his long-standing business partner David Radler pleaded guilty in a Chicago court to charges of fraud.

According to the plea entered by Radler, he "and others devised, intended to devise, and participated in a scheme to defraud [Hollinger] International and International's public shareholders of money, property and their intangible right of honest services". It is the mention of "others" that must worry Black, as Radler has signalled his intention to cooperate fully with prosecutors in return for a reduced prison sentence.

His crime was to authorise bonuses and non-competition payments by Hollinger to a company controlled by Black and himself. It now seems certain that he will testify that Black too was knowingly involved in the scam. The pair are also having to defend themselves against a civil suit launched in the States last year which alleged that they had "cheated and defrauded" Hollinger International shareholders.

But the former *Telegraph* owner is not about to hold his hands up. Nor is he going to stand by an old friend. In fact, he has already begun his own unofficial defence in the business press. The day before Radler offered his plea, unnamed "friends" were telling the *Wall Street Journal*: "Conrad was one step removed from a series of newspaper sales at the center [sic] of the fraud charges… Central to all the negotiations of all the deals is Radler not Black."

At the same time Black is fighting moves in the Canadian courts to make him divulge further information about his collapsed media empire. After Ontario Judge Colin Campbell appointed auditor Ernst & Young to conduct an inspection of Hollinger, the auditing company secured a court ruling that Black would have to answer any questions it had about company transactions. He has refused to do so and earlier in the month instructed his lawyers to appeal against the ruling. Appeal court judges have for the moment reserved judgment.

It would appear Black is the only person left from the one-time stellar board of Hollinger who still refuses to admit any wrongdoing. In May a group of Hollinger directors – including former secretary of state Henry Kissinger – agreed to pay out nearly £30m to shareholders for failing to exercise their corporate responsibilities in regard to Black and Radler's running of the company. It goes without saying that Kissinger will not be forced to dip into his own wallet to settle: the bill will be picked up by Hollinger's insurance company.

A comparison of Black's CV before and after his defenestration shows just how friendless he has become. In 2003 he sat on the board of Sotheby's, the Bracsan Corporation, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and CanWest Global Communications. Of these jobs, Black now holds precisely none, having resigned or been quietly asked to leave. But never let it be said that he was in it just for himself. In return for being appointed to the board of Sotheby's, Black had generously rewarded the auctioneer's American chairman Alfred Taubman with a Hollinger directorship. Taubman was reappointed to the board even after being jailed for price-fixing in 2002.

In addition to his corporate directorships, Black had also fostered a role as international statesman with seats on the board of various think tanks. At one time, these included the editorial board of the *National Interest* in Washington (which he chaired), the Centre for Policy Studies (director), the Chairman's Council of the Americas Society (member) and the international advisory board of The Council on Foreign Relations (member) in New York. Again, he now retains none of these honours. He has also been banished from the Bilderberg group, the secretive international power-brokers' club.

Of the few bodies that do wish to retain his services, one of the most stalwart is the Hudson Institute in Indiana, where his current entry in the board of trustees reads: "Conrad Black is chairman of Hollinger Inc. in Canada and chairman of Telegraph Group Limited in London". Shurely shome mishtake? By coincidence, also on the Hudson board are Richard Perle and Marie-Josée Kravis. Both Perle and Kravis and have been accused of negligence in carrying out their fiduciary duties as Hollinger directors.

Appropriately, Black also remains on the advisory board of the Nixon Center, whose honorary chairman is Henry Kissinger. No doubt the two will have plenty to talk about by the time of the next AGM – unless Black is already in the slammer by then.

AD NAUSEAM

HOW edifying to see a suddenly sanctimonious fashion industry turn on its one-time darling, Kate Moss.

First H&M, then Burberry, Gloria Vanderbilt and latterly Chanel have dropped her from million-pound modelling contracts after her "cocaine shame". No one else in the fashion industry touches the stuff, naturally.

The news of Moss's tooting must have been particularly awkward for Chanel with whom Moss had a £750,000-a-year contract. The cosmetics giant denied Moss was guillotined because of the drug allegations, but wouldn't give any other reason. Could it be, perhaps, that Chanel was a trifle embarrassed that all round the country there are posters for one of its perfumes featuring a naked Moss alongside the words "Coco" Mademoiselle?

BUPA has sponsored the Great North Run for so many years now its name is synonymous with the event. But to ensure the association was hammered home to the public, the private health group took out ads in every newspaper on the morning after the race.

Thus it was that large pictures of a distressed runner along with the slogan "Congratulations to everyone who took part in yesterday's BUPA Great North Run… Feel Better Now?", appeared alongside news that four runners had died during the half marathon.

One company hoping for a healthier association with sponsorship is Tesco, which is backing the series of Cancer Research UK 10k runs taking place around the country in October. Tesco has been the official sponsor of Cancer Research's "Race for Life" for the last four years, in which time the charity has raised more than £70m – a fraction of the profits Tesco makes every year from the tobacco counters in its 1,200 UK stores.

NEW OLD SAYINGS

"Rolling up stoned gathers no dosh"

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown has responded to high oil prices by repeatedly demanding that OPEC increase output and be "more transparent about the world's reserves". But in his recent keynote TUC speech and elsewhere, he has been less than transparent himself about Britain's own supplies and reserves.

Companies including BP and Shell have extensive North Sea reserves; but because oil in these "mature" fields is difficult to pump, they prefer opening new fields in West Africa or Russia, leaving a lot of North Sea oil as potential reserves on company books.

The department of trade's own energy group is keen to "persuade" companies to maximise their recovery from the older North Sea fields, and is considering various "use it or lose it" schemes whereby firms will have to relinquish fields if they fail to exploit them. However, sources within the DTI are deeply frustrated by the attitude of Number 10 to their efforts. Even a figure as influential as Joan McNaughton (see In the Back, *Eye* 1141), who as head of the energy division is keen to squeeze more from the North Sea, has been knocked back by Tony Blair's office from pushing firmer "fallow field" policies which might pressurise companies by taking back unused oil licences.

There is of course a simple reason for this. Oil companies in general, and BP in particular, have unfettered access to Number 10. BP executive Nick Butler can pop in to see Blair's industry adviser, Geoff Norris, at any time.

Brown's speech to the TUC even appeared to reflect these realities. For though Amicus, an important union in his audience, has been pushing for better exploitation of North Sea reserves for some time, and even though the union likes the DTI response, Brown made no mention of Britain's own oil, focusing his fire on OPEC instead.

The treasury would not explain why he failed to mention Britain's own reserves in his oil speech, but a spokesman gave the official line that: "As a mature province, obviously production from the UK continental shelf is expected to decline over the medium to long term, but the government is working through a joint taskforce with the oil and gas industry, named PILOT, to maximise what can be recovered."

BP's hold over Labour's North Sea policy has recently been seen elsewhere. The UK Offshore Operators Association is currently challenging an employment tribunal ruling that extends the European working time directive to oil rig workers. The oil firms say their staff are not in British territorial waters so don't deserve the legal right to four weeks' paid holiday enjoyed by landlubbers. If the government clarified its laws, it could ensure that offshore workers get their holidays and stop the oil firms' legal challenges. When Alan Johnson was employment minister, he even proposed tightening this law. But the Number 10 policy unit blocked him. The head of that unit, Anji Hunter, is now BP's top spin doctor.

Current employment minister Gerry Sutcliffe made similar noises about "clarifying" the law at the TUC, but whether clarification will be in the offshore workers' favour or BP's remains to be seen.

IT'S a question that often puzzles observers of the political scene: what do John Prescott and his grand office of the deputy prime minister (ODPM) actually *do*?

At last Lord Gnome has an answer. Since May 2004 the ODPM has been running "Excellence in Delivery", billed as a "change programme". Awards are dished out every year to those who have been particularly successful in "delivering outcomes". The current exhibition of this year's winners and nominees features the following nominated entry:

"Brand Group, government office for the North West (GONW). In May 2004 the name of one of the GONW buildings was changed. The cross-government office brand group saw an opportunity to improve corporate stationery. The group was committed to delivering the new stationery quickly. The team maintained regular liaison with the office, gaining support and input from staff across GONW. Careful planning and good teamwork ensured a faultless transition to the new arrangements in July 2004. The new stationery has a fresher design, led to reduced costs and raised staff awareness of GONW's corporate identity."

Congratulations to all concerned – and especially to Prezza, whose vision made it possible. Can a "paperclip initiative" be far behind?

"I like Ken Clarke – he's an ordinary bloke, isn't he?"

REVOLVING DOORS

HOW long before the NHS pathology service is privatised? Probably not long given the appointment of Lord Patrick Carter as chairman of the review panel examining the future of NHS pathology.

Carter founded the private British medical firm Westminster Healthcare, selling his share in 1999. His latest appointment is just another example of Whitehall's revolving doors jobs policy. A close friend of Jack Straw (he was best man at both his weddings), Tony Blair elevated him to the peerage in 2004, since when he has been on the board of McKesson UK, a high-tech company which sells equipment and services to the NHS. He has also run "reviews" for Tony, including a review of prisons that recommended... more privatisation!

Meanwhile Dr Tom Mann, who ran the NHS's National Implementation Team setting up multi-million pound deals with the private sector to run diagnostic and treatment centres for the NHS, has become chief executive of Capio Healthcare UK, the British branch of the Swedish health firm that runs many of those private NHS hospitals.

The department of health assured *Private Eye* that Capio did not win any contracts, or achieve preferred provider status, while Dr Mann was employed in the implementation team. So that's all right, then.

CONFERENCE SPECIAL

AS EVER corporate business sponsors were keen to pay for a quiet word with cabinet ministers and to bask in their reflected glory at a series of Labour party conference meetings hosted by the *New Statesman*.

Health minister Liam Byrne was scheduled to talk about health policy on a platform paid for by the private provider **BUPA** – Byrne being the perfect business-friendly "new" Labour minister. A one-time Andersen consultant seconded to the party as an adviser to Tony Blair, he also worked for the NM Rothschild investment bank. He squeezed into parliament in a by-election last year before landing a ministerial job.

In Brighton, Byrne was also due to address a meeting on "good nutrition" paid for by **Compass Group**, the firm exposed by Jamie Oliver for its disgusting Turkey Twizzlers. The *Jamie's School Dinners* expose should have seen schools take control of their kitchens back from the private sector; but Compass is lobbying to turn the scandal to its advantage, using worries about school food to increase payments to contractors like, er, Compass.

Initially **Professor Robert Pickard** of the **British Nutrition Foundation** was due to appear on the platform too. This was no surprise as the government relies on the foundation for nutritional information; but as Labour MP David Taylor noted in a recent early-day motion, the foundation is largely funded by food industry giants like Coca Cola, McDonalds and Cadbury's. Pickard was eventually dropped in favour of **Food Standard Agency** member **Sue Dibb**.)

Creative industries minister James Purnell, a former adviser to Tony Blair, and loyal Blairite MP **Chris Bryant** were both due to expound on the "Convergence of a Multimedia world" alongside **NTL chief executive Simon Duffy**, paid for by the cable company. NTL needs all the government friends it can get at the moment as regulators consider breaking the grip of Rupert Murdoch's Sky on football broadcasts, opening possibilities for NTL.

Purnell was also pencilled in to talk about "socialistic markets" (a rare mention of the "s" word!) at a meeting sponsored by **Provident Financial**. This company specialises in high interest-rate loans to the poor: anyone for a Vanquis credit card with 49.9% APR? Provident Financial's pennies were also paying for platforms graced by **treasury minister John Healey, education secretary Ruth Kelly** and former economics adviser to Gordon Brown, **Ed Balls MP**.

Healey was also scheduled to talk about "What to do with British Towns" courtesy of the **British Property Federation**, the trade body for the building and investment industry. He was to be joined by **BPF chief executive Liz Peace**, whose case is basically that cities will be "regenerated" when "punitive regulations" are torn up and "financial incentives" are introduced. Or put another way: bollocks to planning laws and tax breaks now, please.

The *Statesman* also organised a meeting at which **transport minister Karen Buck** was due to speak about transport policy courtesy of **FLYBE**.

Labour's favourite think tank, the **Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)**, was also due to host a slew of corporate-backed chats.

Home office minister Tony McNulty was expected to address Britain's "identity crisis" at a meeting sponsored by ID card bidder **Siemens** and focusing on immigration and asylum.

Health secretary Patricia Hewitt was due to take centre stage courtesy of drug firm **Pfizer**; while **pensions minister Stephen Timms** was invited to talk about pensions courtesy of **Norwich Union** – which recently started opting customers back into the government's SERPS pension as its own "top up" deal didn't compete. **Stephen Byers** meanwhile was due to talk about Kyoto and climate change with Friends of the Earth spokesman Tony Juniper at a meeting sponsored by – ha ha! – **Shell**.

Finally, the **Fabian Society** organised a meeting with **Peter Mandelson** and **John Hutton MP** sponsored by **UPS** – a firm keen to use European competition law to break up the Post Office monopoly; and a talk by **home secretary Charles Clarke** on "active citizenship" alongside **local government minister Phil Woolas**, courtesy of **Capita**.

PENSIONS NEWS

HOW many more cock-ups can paymaster-general "Red" Dawn Primarolo survive as minister in charge of Revenue and Customs?

After the tax credits fiasco comes evidence that the pension tax reforms scheduled for next April are set to cost the exchequer billions – despite promises from Primarolo that they were merely part of a simplification package costing £25m at most.

Under the new rules the costs of putting all sorts of assets into personal pensions (a 1980s Thatcher invention) will qualify for tax relief. Experts have been warning for months that the wealthy will use the changes to get other taxpayers to subsidise their holiday homes and buy-to-let properties, but Primarolo isn't listening.

Debating the rules in the Commons in June, she quickly dismissed Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price's concern over insurer Standard Life's prediction that exploiting the tax relief in this way could cost the exchequer £4bn. "Any suggestions that this will be used as [a tax] avoidance vehicle… are at present unfounded," she said.

Now Standard Life has reported a surge of interest in its personal pensions, partly, it believes, because of the tax-saving opportunities, and stands by its £4bn estimate. Even more cautious experts are predicting a cost around £1bn – not quite as much as tax credits, but getting there.

THE thoughts of government pensions adviser Adair Turner on how to solve the pensions crisis aren't due to be published for a few weeks, yet hints he has dropped so far have already put the financial services industry on edge.

Among Turner's more disconcerting observations is that, while the state pension is administered at an annual cost of less than 0.1 percent of the funds it effectively manages, the fund management industry typically charges about 5 percent when you put your money into a fund and another 1.5 percent a year after that.

Wary of having their toys taken away by any radical proposals to bring in a cost-effective state-run savings-based pension scheme open to millions, the fund managers are anxious to present themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem.

Richard Saunders, head of the Investment Managers' Association, has astutely suggested a fashionable public-private partnership to run any such scheme. This has the attraction of sounding like something that is bound to go down well with "new" Labour while expanding the market from which the fund managers can continue to extract exorbitant fees.

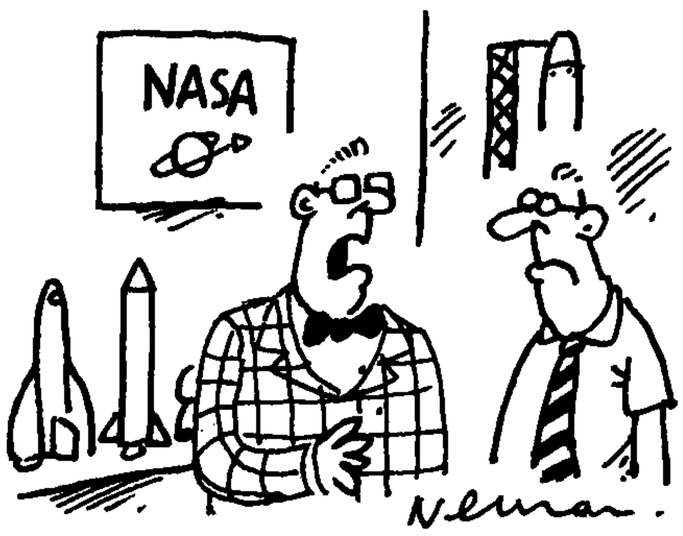
A TUC pensions survey ahead of its Brighton conference produced the not very surprising conclusion that, while employees' pensions are being put at ever greater risk by huge scheme deficits, directors of FTSE 100 companies are accruing increasingly generous retirement incomes.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) was keen to distance itself from this latest bout of boardroom excess, responding that "all employees should have equal access to pension schemes". But anyone hoping that this new egalitarian outlook from the employers might translate into action should consider the records of the companies run by the men at the top of the CBI.

CBI president John Sunderland is also executive chairman of Cadbury Schweppes, which cut staff pensions in 2002 despite rising profits. As well as benefiting from the company's main staff pension scheme, Sunderland stands to do very nicely out of a "supplementary pension scheme" that isn't available to staff generally. Meanwhile his finance director Ken Hanna gets a cash allowance of 30 percent of his salary in return for not joining the pension scheme (several times the company's contribution for other employees), while chief executive Todd Stitzer has a special arrangement that allows him to rack up a pension worth half his salary in just 15 years – the sort of rate ordinary workers can only dream of.

CBI deputy president David Arculus, until recently the PM's deregulation supremo, oversees a similar position as £355,000 a year chairman of mobile phone company O2. Chief executive Peter Erskine has a special "pension promise" that he will get two thirds of his enormous salary (currently £666,000 before bonuses) when he retires at 60. Finance director David Finch gets a specially accelerated accrual of benefits under the company scheme and a "supplementary benefit" of 32 percent of his salary paid into an exclusive scheme.

Clearly the CBI's notion of pension scheme equality involves the boardroom suits being more equal than the rest.



"Our objective is to get to Mars before Tesco does"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

BRUSSELS watchers may want to pinch themselves, but the European Commission is taking legal action against Edith Cresson, the former prime minister of France, whose spell as a commissioner was marked by ignominy after she diverted an EU Aids research grant to her dentist, a friend.

Cresson's favours-for-friends were exposed aeons ago by EU whistleblower Paul van Buitenen, now an MEP, and contributed to the downfall of the administration of Jacques Santer in 1999. There was a legal case against her; but it was thrown out by the Belgian judiciary which decided that, though Cresson had wrongfully employed the late René Berthelot as an Aids expert, earning him £85,000 for two years' work, this was no ground for prosecution.

Now, however, the commission itself has initiated proceedings through the European court of justice; and judges in Luxembourg will stage a public hearing. The commission wants the court to declare that Cresson failed to comply with her obligations as a commissioner. If it is successful, she could be obliged to lose all or part of her pension rights and pay costs too. This would be the first time a commissioner had been penalised financially for having her (or his) nose in the trough.

EU-phemisms

Merde

Down on the Farm

THE victims of the government's grotesque mishandling of the foot-and-mouth catastrophe in 2001 were numberless, starting with those 11 million animals that were butchered, most illegally, not to mention the tens of thousands of farmers and their families who still recall those months as the worst nightmare of their lives. But also on the list are those 350 contracting firms which answered Maff's call for the task of disposing of those millions of carcases, working round the clock in horrific conditions, and which since 2002 Defra has systematically set out to defraud of money owed for the help they gave.

Recently yet another court case has come to light which chillingly exposes the lengths to which Defra has resorted to avoid paying its legal debts. Harry Ruttle, a plant-hire firm in Chorley, Lancs, has for three years been chasing Mrs Beckett and her officials for the £13m outstanding on a £26m contract, for building pyres and burial pits to dispose of animals from 334 farms across the country, which then had to be cleaned up and disinfected to ministry requirements.

The high court case, lasting many months, revealed such a picture of Defra's incompetence and dishonesty that no one was surprised when the judge found resoundingly in Ruttle's favour. Under the judgment Defra must not only agree to pay up, but interest and legal costs on top will bring the total bill to taxpayers to well over £25m, double what it would have cost if Mrs Beckett and her minions had honestly settled their debt in the first place.

For reasons still not entirely clear, for nearly a year after Judge Thornton delivered his judgment in September 2004, the parties were told it would be contempt of court for its terms to be revealed. But now that embargo has been lifted, it can be seen that Ruttle's was only one of hundreds of other contractors whom Defra has stopped at nothing to defraud.

At the beginning of 2004 the same judge ruled that JDM Accord should be paid £5m of the £7m cost of creating a vast burial pit at Ash Moor, Devon, which was never used, and which it cost taxpayers another £3m to fill in. The same week Michael Pedrick, a 63-year-old Devon farmer who had lost all his stock, was cleared of trying to cheat Defra out of £17,000, after the ministry had spent £100,000 trying to convict him. Again Defra was found to have lied.

In scores of similar examples, Defra has eventually browbeaten contractors into accepting much less than they are owed, and has then insisted on their creditors signing the official secrets act to prohibit them from revealing the terms of the settlement. But the Forum of Private Business, which has fought for dozens of contractors, including JDM Accord and Ruttle's, says there are still around ten major cases outstanding. For instance, Robert Pugh of Montgomeryshire is still owed £500,000 after Mrs Beckett's officials have spent three years quibbling over invoices for as little as 35p.

This shameful saga has made one thing abundantly clear. If ever there were a repeat of the crisis of four years ago, no matter how frantically Defra appealed for help, as it did in 2001, not a single contractor would be willing to come to its aid. But they are of course forgetting the new civil contingencies act, under which it could now be made a criminal offence for them not to obey Defra's orders. Our wise rulers have thought of everything.

'Muckspreader'

Clinic Availability Information

- Availability information is not available
- Other information is not available

NHS website

ITV

What ITV Did For Me
The Best of An Audience With...
Ant & Dec's Gameshow Marathon
49 Up (all ITV1)

A FOOTBALL team which has dropped from champions league contention into the third division in recent years would surely hesitate to parade in front of the fans each week the former manager and players who so recently made the club world-class. Logic suggests the crowd would wonder why they couldn't have this kind of quality now and would start chanting for the sacking of the board.

This, though, is what ITV systematically and madly did in marking its 50 years on the screen. Even though Lord Barg had already told The Story of ITV in five instalments over the summer, here night after night for two weeks were anthologies of the programmes made over the years.

In What ITV Did For Me, the inevitable stars – Brucie, Parky, Tarby, Tarranty, Schofieldy, etc – twinklingly reminisced from their homes beside the 18th hole about their years taking the advertising pound.

The first problem was that it soon became embarrassingly clear that most of these stars had enjoyed most or all of their greatest hits while working for the BBC; and that ITV's recruitment policy over the years had largely consisted of offering very big cheques to people being paid from the licence fee. And, even more embarrassingly, these big-cash kidnaps rarely worked: Anthea Turner, Des Lynam and Parky all jumped across the ad-breaks to do much worse work than they had been doing before. The greatest humiliation of Bruce Forsyth's career (Bruce's Big Night) came from a move to the interrupted schedule.

The second handicap in this approach was that it became obvious in all the retrospective shows that all the most entertaining clips featured dodgy haircuts or cars with registration plates in the lower reaches of the alphabet. The terrible fact is that, in any list of ITV's best 50 shows, the only one originated in the last decade would be Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? A sensible network would keep quiet about this lamentable decline but every flashback programme subliminally yelled it out.

In factual programming, the greats – World in Action, This Week – have vanished; and it is unimaginable that the channel would ever launch The South Bank Show or Weekend World now. And, as Paul Abbot topically pointed out in his RTS lecture, ITV now makes Footballers' Wives instead of Cracker.

You could see how bad things are now by the fact that Parky was chosen to front The Best of an Audience With... This use of a presenter who has only returned to ITV in the last couple of years and was involved in one of commercial TV's biggest disasters (the launch of TV-AM) emphasised just how short of talent branded to the third channel ITV now is. All it really has now is or are the Geordie duo; and they were bravely grinning their way through Ant & Dec's Gameshow Marathon, in which, in yet another unwise reminder of past glories, they recreate a different quiz each week: this week Take Your Pick.

Revealingly, by far the best of the anniversary programmes was one which rose organically from ITV's history rather than orgasmically from a lot of current executives sitting around looking for an excuse to hold champagne receptions for themselves and advertisers.

49 Up, Michael Apted's periodic documentary project, is the only ITV programme apart from Coronation Street to have existed for most of the five decades and its existence is genuinely something to celebrate: except that, though this was not mentioned in the PR for Apted's latest part, the third channel never screened 42 UP, which had to be shown by the BBC. That decision, made some eight years ago, perfectly isolates the short-termism, vulgarity and ratings-chasings which led to the ITV we see now.

There are two ways to look at the fact that, back in 1964, the commercial barons felt able to back a documentary project which, if fully realised, would outlive not only them but all except their youngest viewers.

The Thatcherite reading would be that this demonstrated the arrogance and assumption of continuation – in short, the anti-competitive practices – of the old ITV system. But an alternative interpretation would be how wonderful it is now to imagine a television company daring to think that it would and could make programmes of the same quality well into a distant new century.

The programmes going out on ITV last week suggest a company living on past glories, driven by the working principle that standards are irrevocably slipping and with no real confidence that it will be around in any recognisable form by the time Apted's subjects reach 56.

As part of the anniversary jamboree, the company announced the launch of ITV4, an upmarket channel to compete with BBC4 and E4. The initiative at least shows that it realises where the problem is; but the catastrophic flashback shows make clear that it really needs to sort out the first team first.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

WHEN Sky News went live to reporter Jeremy Thompson for the latest on Hurricane Rita, the hack was apparently standing in "the path of the storm".

In fact a gossamer breeze could be seen tickling the leaves in the trees behind him but otherwise all seemed really rather pleasant. When Thompson then interviewed two police officers, he asked them: "Have you seen any damage?"

"No, sir," came the reply.

(This scene was repeated on all channels, courtesy of the 34 people sent by the BBC, the 12 sent by SKY and the three sent by cash-strapped ITN to cover the Rita "story".)

MEDIA NEWS

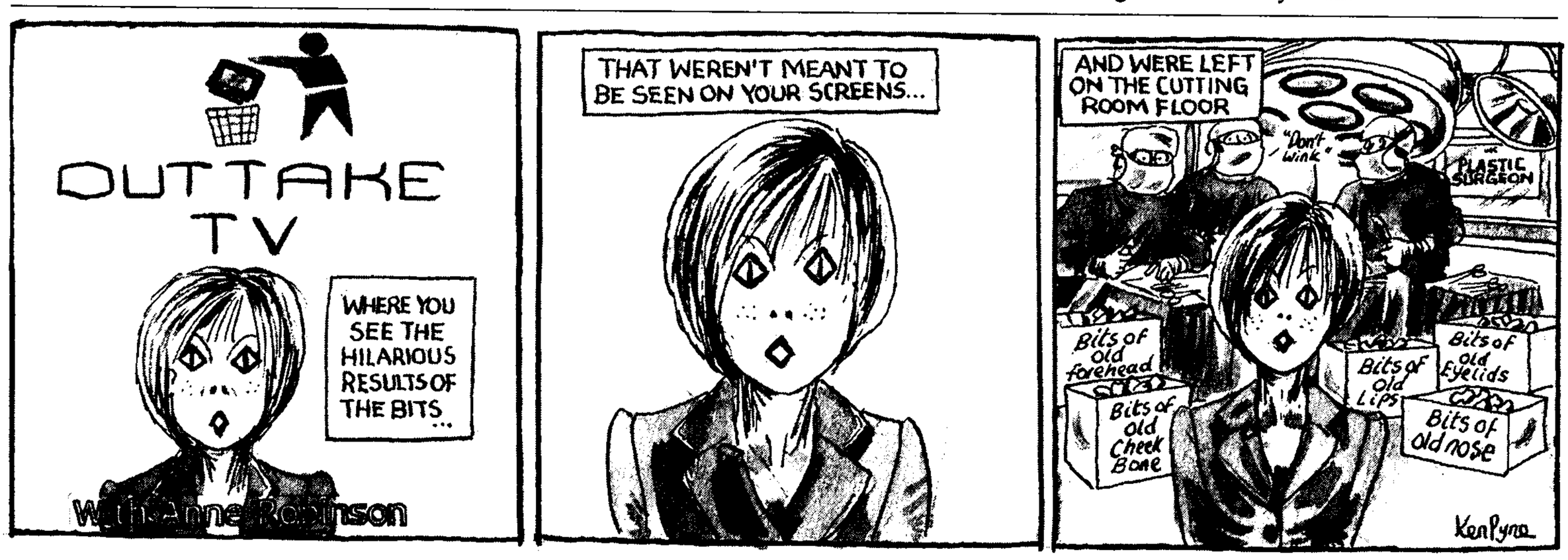
THE BBC has known about government plans for a switch to digital broadcasting for years now, but that didn't stop its director-general Mark "Uriah" Thompson from grovelling to the department of culture yet again last week, declaring the move "a decisive moment".

The switchover will cost millions. Thompson has already admitted there will be no reduction in BBC services to pay for it, so a significant increase in the licence fee is inevitable – extra money that will not go into programme-making. Once all the analogue channels have gone, the government will be able to auction off analogue space at a premium, generating yet more money that will not go into programme-making.

Former BBC DG Greg Dyke told the corporation's in-house magazine *Ariel* it was "dangerous" for the BBC to be so closely linked with government policy. But back in 2003 he told an Edinburgh TV Festival audience that we "can harness the new digital technologies to bring benefits to everyone", adding: "In short, I agree with what Tessa Jowell said yesterday."

EVERY national newspaper bar four made a song and dance last week over the disclosure that Rupert Murdoch had let slip to a New York seminar that "Tony Blair – perhaps I shouldn't repeat this conversation [*sic*] – told me yesterday he was in Delhi last week and he turned on BBC World to see what was happening in New Orleans. And he said it was just full of hate for America and gloating about our troubles."

No prizes for guessing the identity of the four: the *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Sun* and *News of the World*, all Murdoch-owned titles. How different it all is from two years ago, when they could barely contain their outrage at the BBC's Andrew Gilligan and his own indelicate use of a source during the David Kelly affair.


OUTTAKE TV
WHERE YOU SEE THE HILARIOUS RESULTS OF THE BITS...
THAT WEREN'T MEANT TO BE SEEN ON YOUR SCREENS...
AND WERE LEFT ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR
"Don't wink"
PLASTIC SURGEON
Bits of old forehead
Bits of old Cheek Bone
Bits of old Lips
Bits of old Eyelids
Bits of old nose
Ken Pyne

IT'S not just the BBC: Rupert Murdoch appears to be able to find "hate and gloating" in anyone's comments about Hurricane Katrina.

When Bette Midler appeared at a Katrina fundraiser in Madison Square Gardens last week, she joked that "George Bush is a big fan of mine. He came to a show of mine in the 70s. A coke dealer of his got him some tickets," to wild cheers and laughter from the crowd.

According to Murdoch's *New York Post*, however, Midler was booed after she "attempted to politicize her slot by accusing the government of being inept, and made a tasteless joke about President Bush."

Perhaps, however, it was not the remarks about his friend in the White House which Rupert found particularly tasteless. Midler was also loudly cheered for the following observation – "we're surrounded by disasters! The war, the hurricane, Fox News... it just goes on and on!"

THERE is already evidence that viewers are bored stiff with digital, interactive channels, according to the BBC's own audience research unit.

The top 200 television programmes last year contained no multi-channel offerings and viewers are already complaining of "red button fatigue" – bad news for BBC producers obsessed with making everything interactive.

According to Stuart Knapman, head of BBC research, this isn't the BBC's fault but that of the punters themselves. "Audiences can roundly reject a good idea because they don't yet understand what it can do for them," he told *Ariel*.

WHAT does it take to get sacked from Sky News?

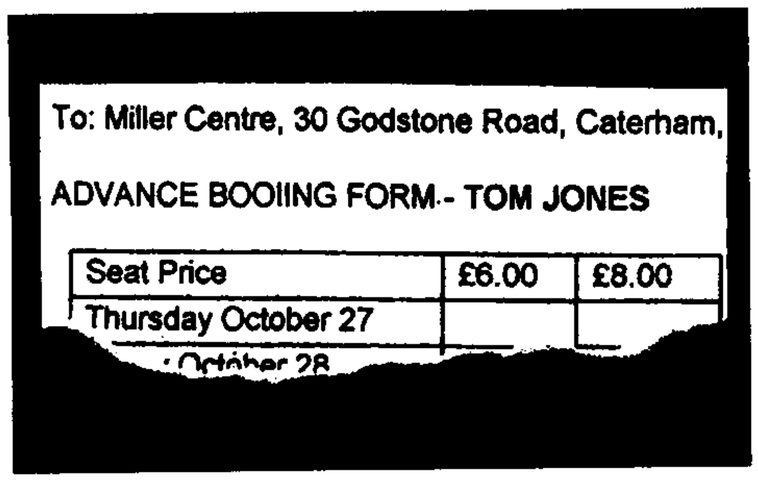
Head-butting and kicking producers is allowed (after launching such an attack at a Christmas party last year, Brussels bureau chief Colin Brazier was promoted to Washington correspondent).

Revealing the prime minister's holiday destination live on air despite a Downing Street embargo is fine (political editor Adam Boulton did so without reprimand in July); as is saying "fuck" on air (Richard Littlejohn, December 2003).

But if you get a cricketer's name wrong, you'll be out the door in less time than it takes an unsubstantiated rumour to reach the "Breaking News" banner.

Reporting from the Oval on the morning of 10 September, freelance reporter Jonah Hull stepped up to an arriving Paul Collingwood and greeted him live on air with an enthusiastic "Morning Geraint, how are you?" mistaking him for Geraint Jones.

Following two days of genial piss-taking from Sky's rivals (themselves smarting from the loss of the game's TV rights to the satellite giant), Hull was called in by his bosses and told his services would no longer be required – this despite the fact that he had told them he had next-to-no knowledge of cricket, was only standing in because the channel's sports correspondent had inexplicably been allowed to take off the weekend of England's fifth test, and had only come out with the name of Collingwood's team mate Geraint Jones because it had been bellowed into his ear by a producer as he stepped up to talk to the player.



DEBT collectors for part of Richard "Dirty" Desmond's Northern and Shell empire are busy chasing five-year-old bills for pay-per-view porn watched via digiboxes.

In numerous cases the bills are for films supposedly watched in 2000, which people say they have never seen – denials made all the more plausible because some of the recipients were out of the country or have other alibis to them not watching TV at the time registered on the bill.

The letters come from a debt collection agency, Key2Recoveries, collecting debts on behalf of Red Hot Films Productions Limited (RHF). While the films cost only a couple of quid each, punters are also being charged a £25 late collection fee.

Key2Recoveries says this is not a scam: in the majority of cases RHF is legitimately owed money and is collecting within the six-year time period allowed. However, it admits that "a number" of the bills have been challenged and that it has discovered errors in the information it was given (plus some cases of identity theft) and as a result it has had to apologise to customers. A spokesman said it has cooperated with trading standards departments around the UK who have followed up complaints from members of the public.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: The adjective Rubenesque, meaning a plump, voluptuous woman, is derived from the work of which 17th-century Flemish artist?

Contestant: Aretha Franklin.

Robinson: Which force keeps the moon in orbit around the earth, and the earth in orbit around the sun?

Contestant: Delta Force.

Robinson: MPs wanting to clear the House of Commons public gallery used to shout "I spy..." what?

Contestant: With my little eye.

National Lottery - In It To Win It, BBC1

Dale Winton: In which country are the ruins of the ancient city of Troy? Is it (a) Tunisia, (b) Italy or (c) Turkey?

Contestant: I think this is when all those years doing A-level ancient history will start to pay off. [Pause] Well it's not Turkey.

"I must warn you – I'm an expert in Sudoku"

LUVVIES

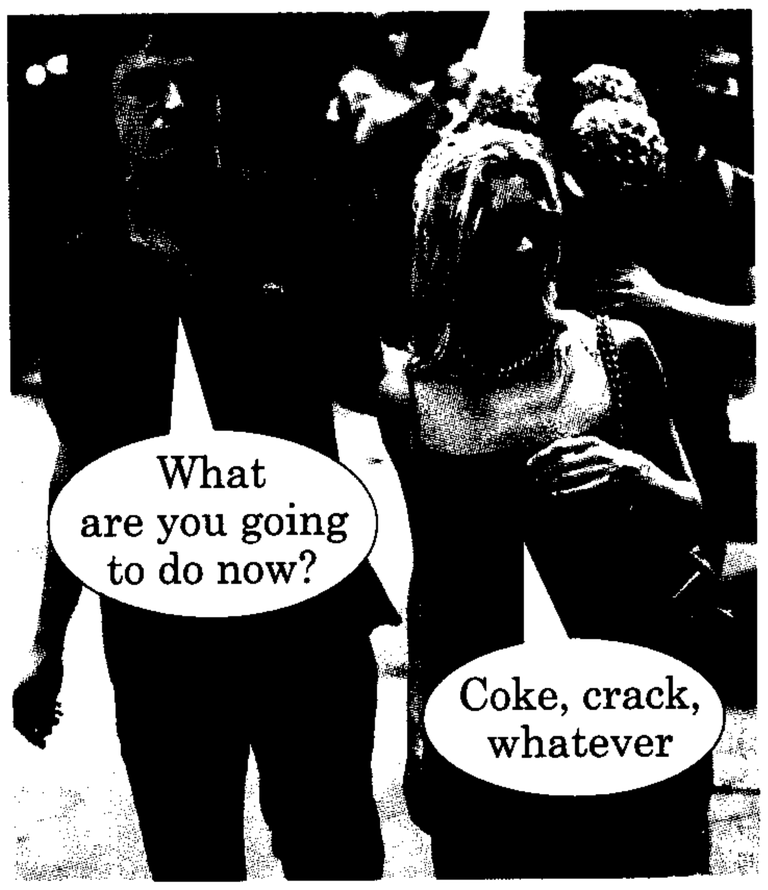
"I love to improvise and he loves to improvise, so it was just a jam session in Africa. Some of the best lines in the film were jazz that came out of his mouth."

RACHEL WEISZ on Ralph Fiennes, *Vanity Fair*

Submitted by Cara Rodway.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

MOSS DRAMA LATEST



OUT OF CON-TEXT

WITH critics unanimous in their opinion of Guy Ritchie's new Kabbalah-gangster flick *Revolver* ("A laughing stock that deserves both barrels – *Daily Mail;* "Twaddle" – *Daily Telegraph;* "A crime against cinema" – *Evening Standard*), whence comes the enthusiastic review which adorns its poster – "BRILLIANT... GUY RITCHIE BACK TO HIS BEST – THE *SUN*"?

Well, not from the *Sun* (where even Johnny Vaughan was forced to admit that the director was "firing blanks" and "I struggled to follow the complicated script"); but, as the smallest of small print makes clear, the Sun Online. Or, to be more specific, the Film First section of the *Sun* website, a commercial operation entirely separate from the paper which exists solely to plug upcoming movies with exclusive behind-the-scenes content provided by their distributors.

The "back to his best" part of the quote was extracted from the following phrase – "Revolver shows Ritchie is back to his best. But don't take our word for it. Why not take a look through our exclusive slideshow by clicking the link below and checking the film out for yourself" – a piece of flimflam concocted long before anyone in Wapping had even seen the film.

But the "brilliant" part appears to have originated from an entirely different source. "It's got a great story and I quite fancy hunky Jason Statham in the lead. I think it's a brilliant film and is going to be a big hit," opined Page 3 girl Ruth, 22, from Kent in the paper's ever-educational "News in Briefs" slot on 22 September. Even here the paper felt obliged to point out a possible conflict of interest to its readers: "By the way, folks... Ruth's in it!"

Warballs

"Budgets for corporate security are increasing according to Forrester Report. This is your opportunity to get on the 2006 budget with major corporate decision-makers. Katrina and the London Tube events are game-changing circumstances that will increase budgets for 2006." – **Circular for the 2006 Business Continuity and Corporate Security exhibition**.

"Can he [Sir Paul McCartney] pinpoint the moment that this late surge of creativity began – his marriage to Heather, maybe, or the recent birth of baby Beatrice? 'I'll tell you what it is,' he says, leaning forward and looking serious. 'I think it has something to do with 9/11. That was really the beginning of it all. Before that, I was wondering if I wanted to tour again, dabbling a bit. Then 9/11 happened...'" – **Observer Music Monthly.**

DOING THE ROUNDS

THE General Medical Council (GMC) has always had a fundamental flaw: it has no idea about the competence of the doctors it regulates.

Being registered with the GMC is essential for all doctors who want to practise medicine in the UK, but they may practise it extremely badly for many years before the GMC even gets to hear about it, never mind do anything.

The GMC has at least tried to get its house in order. The publication of *Good Medical Practice* set out the duties doctors were obliged to adhere to and regular revalidation was proposed to ensure they were actually doing so. Alas, to get the BMA and royal colleges to swallow this, the proposals were so watered down that Dame Janet Smith, chair of the Shipman inquiry, ripped them apart. The chief medical officer Liam Donaldson is now in charge of trying to resurrect revalidation, while the royal colleges wonder if the buck will be passed to them and the GMC waits nervously to see if it has a future.

However, far from being idle the council seems more eager than ever to prove itself fit to practise. It is also having to deal with a record number of complaints, and given the delays in processing these there is a fear that a doctor may continue to do damage in the time lapse between being reported and being assessed.

The initial solution was to suspend doctors from the register when a complaint is made. But those who were subject to vexatious or unfounded complaints, such as Dr Robbie Coull, found that they were suddenly erased without warning and unable to earn a living.

In the spirit of openness, the GMC has also taken to publishing any restrictions on doctors' registration on its website. For one doctor who was undergoing treatment and not currently practising (and therefore posing no risk to patients), the GMC published confidential details of her medical history which were picked up by a local newspaper and caused huge distress.

Also facing GMC assessment is Sunderland GP Dr Phil Peverley. His crime? Writing a satirical column in the doctors' magazine *Pulse*. The column did not breach confidentiality but detailed his reaction to a fictional nursing home built outside his surgery. It included the sentence: "Each letter (from the primary care trust), in essence, said the same thing. 'This crumbly, senile old git has been allocated to your list. He/she is your problem now pal. Enjoy'." Dr Peverley also referred to "a comatose old bag of bones" and "piss-proof carpets".

On 31 July *The People* newspaper ran the headline "You crumbly, senile, old gits..." and reported that the GMC would not be taking action against Dr Peverley. However, one reader was so incensed she wrote to the GMC demanding that it look into the incident. The council argues that it has to carefully assess every complaint made to it, but if this is the case you could easily bring down the GMC by flooding it with complaints about the colour of a doctor's shirt. Censuring a doctor for his fictional outpourings would be absurd.

Dr Peverley is doubtless now wishing he had written under a pseudonym and his latest column details how general practice is a vocation for him (although perhaps not for much longer). But for the GMC to even consider the case suggests how desperate it is to pander to popular opinion and how detached it is from the frontline. You can be an excellent doctor and have a bleak sense of humour. Some would argue the job demands it. But in the current climate, you'd be well advised to keep it in the coffee room.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I DON'T KNOW - YOU SAY THERE'S A RISK IN SURGERY, BUT WITHOUT IT THE CONDITION WILL GET WORSE...
WOULD YOU HAVE THE OPERATION IF YOU WERE ME, DOCTOR?
OH YES...
BUT NOT IN THIS HOSPITAL

ROAD RAGE

THE refinery blockades of September 2005 were a figment of the media's imagination. But they will have been enough to scare Gordon Brown into continuing his freeze on fuel duty.

The threatened blockades which sparked panic buying at some filling stations came from a single source: one Andrew Spence who spoke for something called the "Fuel Lobby". After being caught out by the ad-hoc protests five years earlier, oil companies and the government had contingency plans to counter blockades, so any protest this time would have to be well organised and heavily supported. The media mostly preferred not to question how Spence backed up his claim that "there won't be a refinery in the country left open – every refinery will be blockaded". Even when *Newsnight*'s Jeremy Paxman exposed Spence's pitifully low support, hacks continued to imply that the "Fuel Lobby" was a potent force.

Despite the aid of huge publicity for his protest, Spence couldn't muster enough objectors to make an iota of difference at any refinery. Cue stories about the "flop", diverting attention from the media's own shortcomings after such headlines as "Fuel protesters launch fresh road blockades" (*Sunday Times*), "'Extra days' of fuel tax protests" (BBC) and "Campaigners to extend fuel protests" (*Mail on Sunday*).

Normally a campaign by an unelected and unsupported individual gets little or no coverage; but this time the media had a bone to pick with the government. There were enough selfish motorists to cause a frenzy of panic buying, keeping the story alive and suggesting that the nation was on the verge of anarchy. But a quick glance at the roads shows that motorists aren't paying too much for fuel. Sales of 4x4 gas-guzzlers and "people carriers" have increased, although it's been well-known for years that fuel prices are bound to rise.

From 2001 to 2004, fuel duty for cars and lorries fell 13 percent in real terms. Brown's failure to continue the Tories' fuel-duty escalator since 2000 is calculated to have deprived the exchequer of £12bn so far, and an Open University report estimates the treasury will be missing out on £3bn a year by 2010. Those figures outweigh the extra income from VAT as oil becomes costlier.

Who suffers from that shortfall? Bus and rail passengers for a start. Their fares are still rising faster than inflation. Bus fares are 16 percent more expensive in real terms than when Labour came to power – and motoring is 6 percent cheaper. Britain provides the lowest bus subsidies in Europe, and that's unlikely to change while the media's too busy pushing for lower fuel duty to report on the raw deal for bus passengers.

Who benefits from Brown's largesse? The biggest winners are truckers (whose fuel duty is frozen while Brown hits rail-freight firms with rising diesel duty) and people who drive the biggest cars the furthest, who would otherwise pay the largest share of the missing billions. No wonder there are so many more 4x4s on the roads since the 2000 fuel protests.

PS: Amid the excitement about fuel protests, the Tories found time to trot out the line that speed cameras are a "stealth tax" on motorists. They discovered that drivers who lack the self-discipline to regulate their speed on the tiny proportion of roads covered by speed cameras contribute £22m a year to the treasury (in surplus fines income). Shadow transport secretary Alan Duncan said the money was being used to "fill Gordon Brown's black hole". Which black hole does he mean – the £10bn fiscal gap claimed by the Tories or the £12bn loss through abandoning the fuel-duty escalator? And how is £22m a year going to fill it?

'Hedgehog'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"As of 6am on Wednesday, there won't be a refinery in the country left open. Every refinery will be blockaded. We don't want just hauliers to take action. We are calling on people all over the country to take part and blockade their local refinery."

– Andrew Spence, "official spokesman of the Fuel Lobby", 11 September.

"We didn't want a lot of people here, I would rather there was just a handful of us. We never asked for a blockade."

– Andrew Spence, 15 September.

THE COMMUTERS
OK...NOW, HAVE I GOT EVERYTHING? ...SUITCASE...TOWEL...WASHBAG... TICKETS...GOOD BOOK
GOING SOMEWHERE NICE...?
...JUST TO WORK...BUT THERE'S DISRUPTION ON THE LINE AGAIN
Grizelda

■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

RECKLESS ERYC

SO. FAREWELL THEN Darryl "Bumptious" Stephenson, who at the grand old age of 55 is retiring this week after 10 years as chief executive of East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Eryc).

Over the years the *Eye* has chronicled the various money-making wheezes of "the barrow boy from Hull" – flogging off Beverley's ancient cattle market to Tesco in the face of furious opposition; flogging off old folks' homes in Hornsea for speculative house building; flogging off the council's listed 18th century offices to a thuggish bankrupt second-hand car salesman (*Eyes passim*).

But none of "Darren"-the-developer's-friend's escapades infuriated locals as much as the award to himself of a £36,000 pay rise in 2002, which took his salary to £140,000 (*Eye* 1049). This was in the year that local authority employers were spitting on the modest pay claims of fire fighters and council workers.

Darren is now departing in the style to which has become accustomed. He retires on an undisclosed pension, believed to be worth about £100,000 a year. His replacement as chief executive, on £150,000 a year, is his pal Nigel Pearson, Eryc's former "director of corporate resources". Pearson's replacement, on £100,000+ per year, is the council's former head of legal, Sue Lockwood – aka Mrs Darryl Stephenson. Both these jobs were advertised nationally, as the law requires, and attracted many applicants; but such was the calibre of Pearson and Lockwood that they saw off all the competition!

● **MEANWHILE, having seen details of Lambeth chief executive Faith Boardman's £220,000 pay-off and £74,000 pension in *Eye* 1139, neighbouring Southwark council boss Bob Coomber thinks *he's* worth a lot more. He has, after all, been behind many more cock-ups and cover-ups, and over a much longer period. And he's worried that his career prospects will be limited if Labour takes control of the council next May. But is he really ready to give up his £160,000-a-year-plus-valuable-perks just yet?**

"Captain" Bob has talked Lib Dem council leader Nick Stanton into the perfect solution. Coomber will go after the elections next May, clutching redundo worth more than two years' salary, plus a six-figure pension, in a done deal Labour can't stop. But if by any chance Stanton's Lib Dems get back, Coomber can always bow to popular demand and stay in office, thus enhancing his eventual pension even further. Brilliant!

TECHNOPHOBIA

IN *EYE* 1135 we told of the plight of the residents of Katherine House, a care home for severely disabled adults in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester.

Last year Labour Tameside council said the home was to be closed and replaced by a new state-of-the-art one with 24-hour care. But earlier this year the council reneged on its care promise. Those who need help at night will have to phone a call centre in Wiltshire.

This is not good news for people who cannot go to the loo unaided. But it would all be OK, said the council, because in their new "very sheltered housing" the residents would be provided with "assistive technology" – gadgets and gizmos which would remove the need for human carers.

While they wait for a court hearing on 31 October to challenge the closure, the Katherine House residents have been trying out some of this kit. A number of them have been given wrist bands or medallions with buttons on for them to call help. Victoria Blinkhorn has a phone in her room, so her alarm goes off when it rings. Harold Allen, who has epilepsy, has an alarm fitted to the waist band of his trousers. This goes off when he pulls his trousers up, but failed to do so when he had a serious fall. Brian Parkinson was surprised to have a couple of paramedics burst in and an ambulance arrive when he was just having a shave. He also has an incontinence monitor on his bed. Although he has not wet the bed since it's been fitted, it keeps waking him up with the cheery message "You are incontinent! Do you require assistance?"

Who needs nurses?

● **PRESS RELEASE of the week comes from East Ham Conservatives. It begins: "Royal Docks councillor Michael Law today delivered a hammer blow to the Labour Party in Newham, by announcing his defection from Labour to the Conservatives." Indeed, with its majority over the Tories on Newham council reduced from 58-0 to 57-1, the Labour party must be reeling with shock.**

TREMBLING BOSOMWORTH

BACK in February we observed that "ignorance is bliss, it seems, in the Yorkshire seaside resort of Scarborough" (*Eye* 1125). The Tory council and its officers had been savaged by an audit commission report into a grandiose sea defence scheme for which it illegally hired a firm of engineering consultants without putting the job out to tender.

The scheme cost £14m more than estimated and officers ignored the council's own and the EU's tendering rules – although they did prepare a bogus "best value" report after doubts were raised. Needless to say Scarborough's elected councillors, led by Eileen Bosomworth, hadn't a clue what was going on and did nothing to ensure that things were above-board. Instead of resigning, Bosomworth set up an inquiry under retired head teacher Richard Penn.

Six months on, Penn has delivered his report which, we understand, "names and blames" those responsible for the fiasco. Cllr Bosomworth, natch, has vowed to keep it under wraps. Chief executive John Trebble – who by a happy coincidence is taking early retirement at the end of the year – has said that councillors and the public will "never, ever" see the Penn report. So much for open government!

AUSTIN AMBASSADOR

ONE former employee of collapsed car giant MG Rover has happily fallen on his feet, unlike thousands of colleagues.

Alistair Morton, the company's former training manager who was made redundant in April, has been appointed head of communications for Birmingham city council. He reports to the Conservative leader of the ruling Tory-Lib Dem coalition, Mike Whitby.

One of Morton's last acts at Rover was to arrange the long-term loan of a £65,000 top-of-the range MG SV sports car to, er, Cllr Mike Whitby. At the time Morton said the loan was "totally above board". Cllr Whitby was said to be an "ambassador" for the city... "we needed to promote it [the sports car] among people who could afford to buy it".

When Rover collapsed and employees with company cars were being obliged to give them back, Cllr Whitby hung on to his freebie, only returning it months later. Alas, even with the cachet of Cllr Whitby behind the wheel, only a handful of MG SVs were ever sold. It is estimated that developing this dud accounted for some £48m of Rover's debts. Let's hope Mr Morton has a happier story to tell for his new boss. So impressive, apparently, are his spin-doctoring skills – despite limited experience in the field – that Brum council appointed him without advertising the job.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

"YOU need the right equipment, skills and determination to do better," wrote Tesco executive Terry Leahy in a bizarre recent oped-page advertorial in the *Sun* exhorting more youngsters to take up sport.

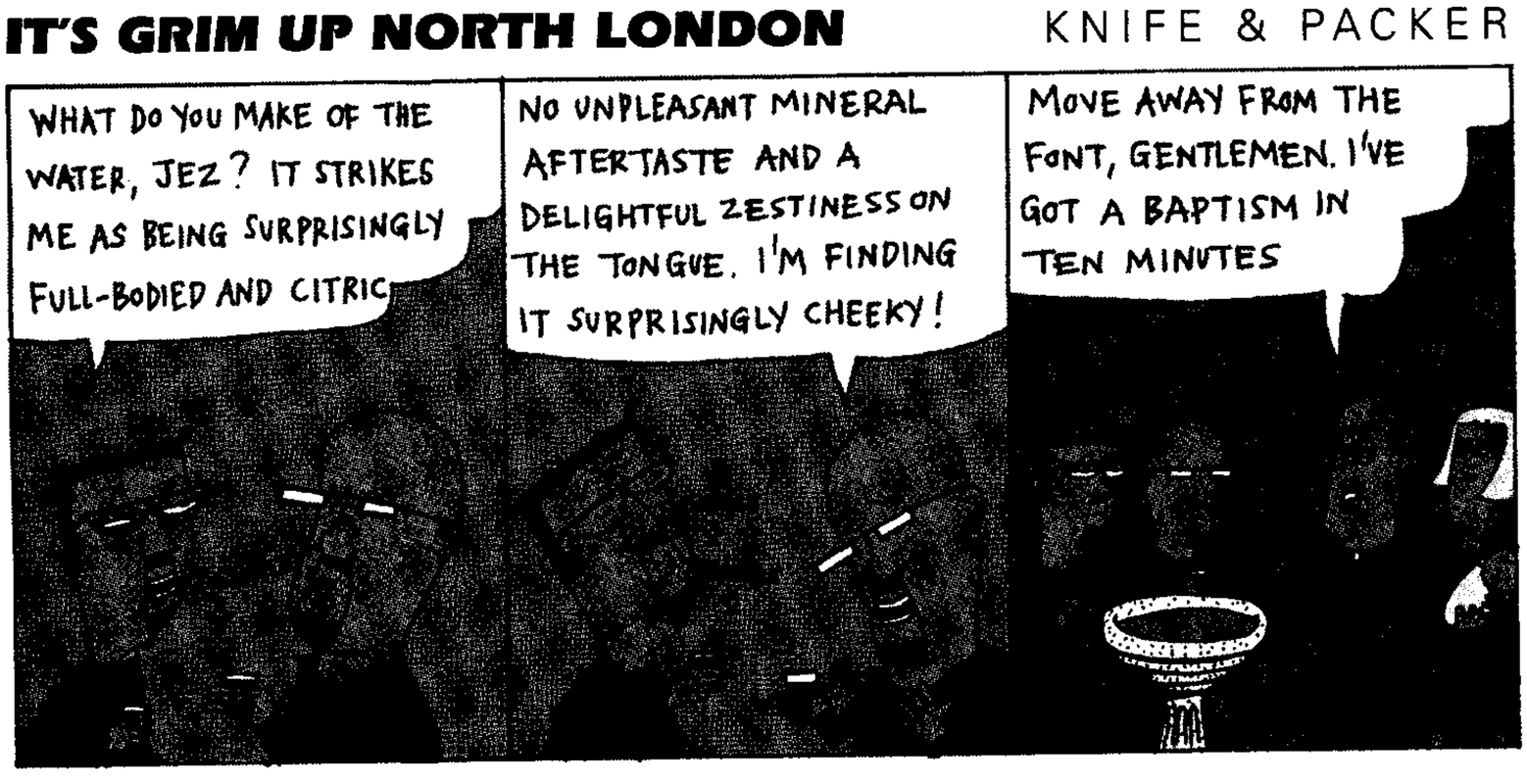
It was time "to invest in kids if we are to find the next generation of sporting superheroes", he argued, while shamelessly plugging a new scheme promoted by Tesco which "will allow schools and clubs to put vouchers towards coaching. This is so many more young people can receive the training they need in a variety of sports. We hope to provide at least £10 million of equipment and coaching to the UK's schools and clubs."

What Leahy didn't mention was that young people also need somewhere to train; and one obstacle to this has been the irresistible expansion of a certain supermarket chain buying up land. Tesco opened almost 100 new branches last year; and since Leahy was appointed CEO in 1997 it has faced fierce public campaigns to stop it gobbling up green fields in, among other places, Stockport and Rye.

THE *Guardian*, long a critic of the city academies scheme which allows businesses a say in what is taught in the schools they sponsor, runs its own "Learn" page in its weekly education section, offering free teaching materials tailored to stages in the national curriculum.

Last week's lesson focused on what was easily the week's biggest global news story: how, ahem, "the newspaper industry is changing". "A special report on the new mid-sized *Guardian* – featuring a history of the rebranding process, an explanation of the new fonts used and an article detailing the logistics of the launch – is available at www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian", hack Lyndsey Turner helpfully informed teachers.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE WATER, JEZ? IT STRIKES ME AS BEING SURPRISINGLY FULL-BODIED AND CITRIC
NO UNPLEASANT MINERAL AFTERTASTE AND A DELIGHTFUL ZESTINESS ON THE TONGUE. I'M FINDING IT SURPRISINGLY CHEEKY!
MOVE AWAY FROM THE FONT, GENTLEMEN. I'VE GOT A BAPTISM IN TEN MINUTES

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE evidence emerges of how the Olympic Games will be used to push through advantageous property developments – advantageous to everyone except people who live in the East End of London, that is.

An important aspect of the Olympic project is improving London's public transport (which ought to be done anyway) and a crucial aspect of this is extending the East London Line both south and north.

This is admirable and sensible and will largely use pre-existing railway tracks. For instance, the line north from Shoreditch will join the derelict viaduct from Dalston Junction – derelict because that most useful North London Line into Broad Street in the City was stupidly closed to facilitate the Broadgate development in the 1980s (the developer being Sir Stuart Lipton, ex-chairman of CABE who resigned over potential conflicts of interest [*Eyes passim*] and whose forgetfulness in registering his interest as a director of Stratford City Developments, which had dealings with the London Olympics team, is also now raising eyebrows. But I digress...)

As the East London Line project will use existing viaducts and stations, why is it necessary to demolish several potentially useful buildings in Dalston Lane next to Dalston Kingsland, formerly Dalston Junction station? These include two (locally listed) Georgian houses and the derelict Dalston Theatre, a building of 1886 with Art Deco alterations which English Heritage described as having an "attractive and architecturally distinctive frontage". Demolition is envisaged – indeed has already been agreed – because the London Development Agency is managing proposals for both the London borough of Hackney and Transport for London to "ensure the comprehensive redevelopment of the site." And this despite the fact that Hackney is carrying out a public consultation over its area action plan with the option of retaining these historic buildings in Dalston Lane, all of which – fires notwithstanding – are capable of restoration and reuse. No wonder that OPEN (Organisation for the Promotion of Environmental Needs), a local pressure group, is threatening judicial review. Good luck to it.

PS: As "The Mayor's Agency for Business & Jobs" is "responsible for driving London's sustainable economic growth", it is not surprising the LDA is encouraging gratuitous development in Dalston (especially as Ken Livingstone wants all London boroughs to have more tall buildings). Similarly, further south in Whitechapel the LDA has bought some Georgian terraces in Varden Street and Turner Street, behind the Royal London Hospital, which it hopes to demolish and replace by a "bio-innovation centre."

These houses are rare survivals and in a conservation area and the Spitalfields Trust would like to restore them. All of which confirms that the mayor, like the Labour and the various agencies and commissions it has spawned, care not a jot for the historic environment.

IN the CABE annual report, entitled* Whose place is it anyway?, *new chairman John Sorrell – who gave us the ethnic tailfins on BA planes – writes that: "The great initial success of CABE, led by my predecessor Sir Stuart Lipton, has been to stamp the importance of design upon the political agenda."

Yet in a letter to the Daily Telegraph on 1 September, Simmons defended John Prescott's wicked "Pathfinder" demolitions in the north of England as facilitating "choice" by targeting "dilapidated terrace housing that desperately needs renewing" and insisting that "our analysis is not driven by aesthetics. It's derived from a long-established and objective set of principles about what makes a place that people will thrive in."

From this we can only conclude that in CABE's view aesthetics have nothing to do with "design", and that this quango will do whatever the government wants it to do.

Meanwhile, Prescott is pressing ahead with the systematisation of the north. In Middlesborough, his agent is the "robocop" mayor Ray Mallon [Eye 1139] who, stung by criticism from local opponents of his plans to destroy 1,500 terraced houses in the Gresham area, insists that "I'm going to knock their houses down because I believe it is the right thing, but I'm determined that I'm going to do the very best for them so they have a better life."

How very considerate. Ken Walker, however, the former council leader who represents Gresham, agrees with locals that the plans are really intended to create a lucrative brownfield site for office development: "This is not about the residents, it is about creating a site which will be very attractive to developers." Locals dispute the council's figures for the number of empty houses and deny that Gresham is riddled with crime. In fact, it seems to be a relatively harmonious multi-racial community and – until the council announced its vision of destruction – house prices had risen by more than 50 percent in three years.

None of which seems to matter to Labour. As the title of the CABE annual report says, whose place is it anyway?

'Piloti'

I-SPY

Luxor *(Tim & Katherine Lewis)*

La Reole, SW France *(Joe Paget)*

Zell-um-See, Austria *(Peter Coulton)*

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE death of nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal has prompted tributes from around the world as a beacon of conscience and for his single-minded pursuit of justice.

But the Los Angeles-based centre that bears his name, set up by Wiesenthal in 1977, seems to take single-mindedness to extremes for an organisation that also runs a Museum of Tolerance. Tolerance hasn't always been obvious in its attempts to close serious artistic ventures deemed anti-semitic by Wiesenthal's investigators.

One notorious example has been the centre's worldwide campaign against all productions of John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*: an opera which as a result has been effectively banished from view. It only had its British stage premiere the other week in Edinburgh – some 14 years after it was written to a co-commission from a British opera company, Glyndebourne.

Klinghoffer was condemned on the grounds that it portrayed the hi-jack of the cruise-liner *Achille Lauro* in neutral, even-handed terms that failed to denounce the Arabs as devils and failed to eulogise the Jewish passenger they killed as a saint. That to have done so would have reduced a profoundly thoughtful work of art to comic-strip status was of no interest to the Wiesenthal Centre. Nor was the fact that the rich and eloquent libretto had actually been written by a Jew (albeit one who subsequently embraced Christianty).

To Wiesenthal's men it was simply anti-semitic. Glyndebourne took fright after it was quietly but firmly made clear that a production would guarantee the withdrawal of future funding from Jewish patrons. And other houses throughout the world followed suit, for similar reasons.

When, eventually, Scottish Opera bravely took on *Klinghoffer* the other week, the Wiesenthal Centre went on the offensive again, defaming everyone involved with the production as "moral midgets" and demanding an audience boycott to teach them a lesson. Fortunately, for once the centre's heavy-handed tactics failed: the show went on – but with a lot of empty seats, which will have meant a loss for Scottish Opera (one this troubled company is in no position to afford) and, equally, a loss for those members of the public who stayed away. Thanks to Mr Wiesenthal's apostles of tolerance, they missed the chance to see one of the most moving, generous and *truly* tolerant music-theatre pieces of our time.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

A fitting monument to someone who triumphed over overwhelming odds to end up here in Trafalgar Square.
ALISON LAPPER PREGNANT BY MARC QUINN
Good old Marc!

THE ACADEMY
SUPERLEARNING FOR LENGUAGES
Language school, Palma, Majorca

Letters

MP writes....

Sir,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to reply to the allegations printed in the HP Sauce section of issue 1138 about me.

I completely dispute any allegation of wrongdoing or unethical treatment of my staff. All my staff are employed on standard House of Commons contracts and I would never seek in any way to dodge my responsibilities as an employer.

No member of staff was "eased out". Both members of Gerry Steinberg's staff were offered contracts which one person accepted and one turned down. All three current members of staff are happy with the situation and I don't believe have any complaints with me as an employer.

Additionally, I would point out that I was not "gifted" the seat. I took part in a hard and well fought standard and full selection campaign for my home constituency which I won fairly with a huge majority of local Labour Party members voting for me.

Yours sincerely,
ROBERTA BLACKMAN-WOODS MP,

City of Durham.

Nuclear fall-out

Sir,

It's always interesting to learn something of the kind of people who get highly-paid posts in government and government-linked business and how they get them (Jobs for the Girls, issue 1141) – but that doesn't necessarily mean that the affairs they run are rotten too.

You have a surprisingly green view of nuclear power, very much in line with other journalists in fact. It's just a knee-jerk with you, isn't it – nuclear = bad.

You talk about "disintegrating nuclear power stations". Would you like to name them? You talk about "all the nuclear waste around the country". Where precisely is this stuff strewn around? You say "everyone can live happily... except those who are due to have... generators built in their neighbourhood". I've never heard of serious complaints from the residents of Heysham or Hartlepool (although some inhabitants of Selby are not happy about the odd-shaped heads of their offspring, seemingly related to coal-fired generation, and there are plenty of people unhappy with the prospect of wind farms in their local field).

We are looking at steeply rising prices for oil and gas, which we import from foreigners with far from impeccable regimes. When you've finished answering the questions posed above, maybe you could ponder this one: can I do without electricity?

Or is it: "I don't care: I'll watch TV by candlelight"?

Keep up the good work, but do think about it.

Yours,
ROBERT WALKDEN,

Tideswell, Derbyshire.

Barking

Sir,

I know it may be screamingly obvious, but I thought lest it had slipped your eagle eye that the relaunched Grauniad is begging to be included in your lexicon of "new rhyming slang", viz Guardian Berliner = Dog's Dinner.

PHILIP FOXE,

London N10.

Figures don't fit

Sir,

As a GP I always turn to MD first when a new Private Eye arrives. Usually very accurate, but the last issue suggested that 30 percent of epileptics were misdiagnosed cardiac patients. I was anxious about this figure as it sounded very high and a major scandal. The figure was repeated on the STARS website.

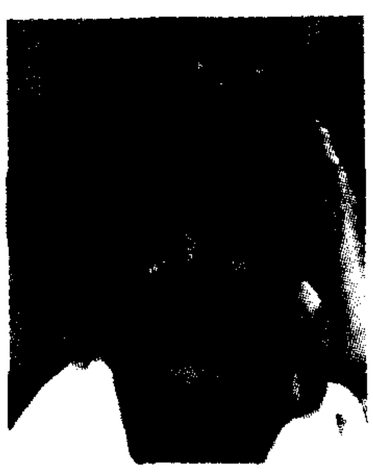
I searched for misdiagnosed epilepsy and found an article stating 20-30 percent of epileptics may be misdiagnosed. Zaidi etal, J Am Coll Cardiol 2000; 36:181-184. This is a flawed study selecting either patients with an uncertain diagnosis in the first place or [who] were not fit-free on treatment.

This means that all patients with epilepsy diagnosed and appropriately treated were excluded. Figures suggest this is around 85 percent. Therefore possibly 6-9 percent of epileptics may be misdiagnosed and half of these are already suspected. Not quite as eye catching as 30 percent but maybe more realistic.

Yours,
CHRIS JOHNSTONE,

Via email.

Lookalike



Finnegan

Merkel

Sir,

Good to see Judy Finnegan back on her feet after Richard dumped her for the younger Angela Merkel. It is a shame that Judy did not quite win the German elections. Must be still a bit upset.

Yours sincerely,
ANDREW WILKINS,

Via email.

Rhythm sticks

Sir,

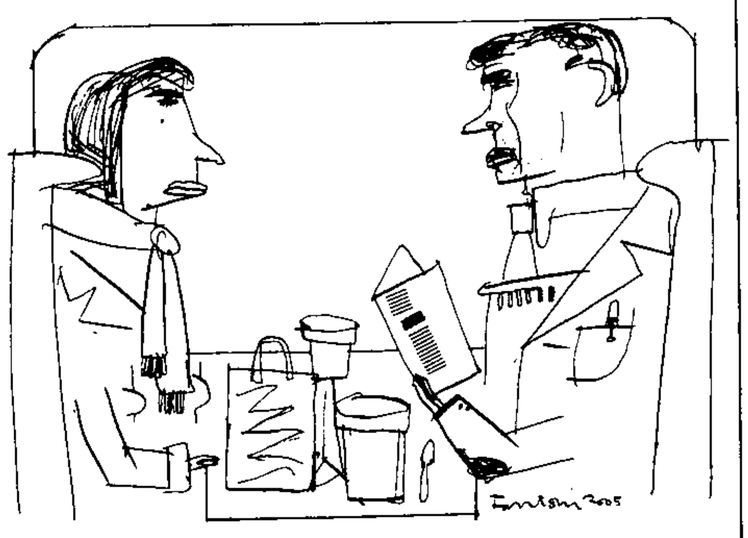
The story of the unfortunate woman who was misdiagnosed with epilepsy when she had a heart rhythm disorder is well known. She herself told the sorry tale to several hundred people assembled in Birmingham in February for, among other things, the launch of the new National Service Framework (NSF) for Arrhythmias and Sudden Cardiac Death by then health minister John Reid. Incidentally he couldn't pronounce arrhythmia.

Far be it for me to defend the government, but it is precisely because treatment for heart rhythm disorders was identified as being patchy (and maybe because of The Vicar's dicky ticker), that this document was produced. I was part of one of the expert groups that put the new NSF together; and the document is far from perfect, but it's a start. Hopefully it will lead to people who experience funny turns being effectively assessed, and diagnosed. Whether the money will be made available to keep up with the demand for pacemakers and other interventions is another matter. But thankfully the majority of people having funny turns just need a few simple tests and reassurance.

Trust me, I'm a nurse.
SUE SIMPSON,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Excuse me while I take a few moments to familiarise myself with this train's safety regulations"

Supermarket sweep

Sir,

In Eye 1121, the pessimistic Piloti doubted whether Wycombe District Council would have the guts to reject bullying superstore Waitrose's plans to overwhelm Marlow-on-Thames's conservation area with a massive superstore development. Readers will be delighted to know that, at a public meeting which was held in Marlow on 12 September, attended by hundreds of Marlow residents, Wycombe's councillors rose to Piloti's challenge and comprehensively threw out all the Waitrose planning applications.

A problem remains in that Wycombe's head of urban design, Penelope Tollitt, stated at the meeting that a store of a similar size to the one that had been rejected had "always been envisaged for the site", so that in her view a store of a similar size was bound to be built eventually. On further inquiry it transpired that it was Waitrose's own vision that Ms Tollitt was projecting!

The development proposed by Waitrose involves the removal of 10,000 cubic metres of spoil from the site to build the underground car park. The laugh of the evening was provided when it came to light that the arrogant developer intends to route all its gravel lorries from the site over Marlow bridge. As all Marlovians know, but the developer had been too arrogant to find out, Marlow's suspension bridge is a Grade I listed building with a weight limit of 3 tonnes!

Thanks for the help in round one.

Yours etc,
MIKE POST,

The Marlow Group.

Floating an idea

Sir,

In Piloti's article today he opposes the suggestion that the airship sheds at Cardington should be given a vast shoe box of a warehouse to be built directly in front of the R101 shed.

As the shed is listed as Grade II and the adjoining shed used for building research, why can't the R101 hangar be refurbished as a warehouse and solve the whole problem?

My father was coxswain on R101 and died in her in an early political cock-up, so I am much concerned personally.

Yours,
ROY OUGHTON,
Cambridge.

London Eye-wash

Sir,

As the project director for the London Eye, I was fascinated by your analysis of BA's "cunning plan" to avoid paying tax on the London Eye's profits.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but the reality is more mundane. In September 98 BA did not see this deal was as tax efficient in the long term. The economy was buoyant and no one could have forecast those catastrophic events three years into the future that were to plunge BA into the red and create those long-term tax credits.

The reality is very simple. BA wanted to put the money in as equity and take the profits in the form of dividends. David Marks, the originator of the project and one third shareholder, would not accept the consequential dilution of his share as BA pumped money in. It was he that put forward the idea of a high interest loan; it would preserve his influence at the board and yet give BA a suitable reward for taking all the commercial risk.

It was a good deal for BA and circumstances made it even better.

PAUL BAXTER,
Project Director, BA London Eye 1998 to 2001.

Pass the sickbag

Sir,

We know that all hacks piss in the same pot and are on the ball defending each other, but the support for Chief Script/Monitor Reader John Humphrys in his "battle" against his paymasters and the Murdoch press calls for the Eye's famed sickbag. Humphrys and his courageous colleagues are not afraid of accepting brown envelopes from the Dirty Digger's rags for their written contributions on page 94, whilst on page 1 there are articles on the iniquities of public service broadcasting. I wrote to that Eddie Mair once about his articles in the Grauniad and the silly lad thinks that that paper supports PSB. Once again, the late Robin Day's description comes to mind – most hacks are media spivs.

Yours,
MIKE MITCHELL,
Hove, East Sussex.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"It's nice for us to have a fresh face in the camp sometimes for us to bounce things off..."
LAWRIE SANCHEZ, Sky Sports News
(Mike Barrie)

"We've got the quality to beat them but we haven't."
IAN WRIGHT, BBC
(Jeffrey Leader)

"They [Aston Villa] seem to beat the teams halfway down but struggle against the teams halfway up."
MARK LAWRENSON, news.bbc.co.uk
(James French)

"The defender was so laid-back there he was almost vertical."
FRANK STAPLETON, TV3
(Paul Nolan)

"China is like a different world... it's like a different country."
STEVE DAVIS, Talk Sport
(Michael Charalambous)

SOLUTIONS

"Teramica: Ceramic Solutions" – *tiles*

"Siemens Transportation: Efficient Rail Solutions" – *trains*

"Brainlab: Neurosurgery Solutions, Orthopedics Solutions, Radiotherapy Solutions and Spine and Trauma Solutions" – *medical equipment*

"Marks and Spencers' new autograph collection offers you a total wardrobe solution" – *clothes*

"Axiom Worksurface Solutions" – *worksurfaces*

"Hilton Meeting Menu Solutions" – *tea and biscuits*

All submitted by readers

Stumped

Sir,

Tempted as I am to keep quiet, the letter from Robert Charles of Channel Five annoyed me enough to respond.

He says that viewers without Sky can watch the cricket on his channel. He seems unaware that many people, including me, cannot actually receive Channel Five, unless we have... er... Sky. (And unlike the BBC channels, the signal is scrambled too, requiring payment to... Sky.)

We do not receive it through analogue, we do not have Freeview, so if I wanted to watch the cricket, I would need to get... Sky, regardless of whether I wanted to watch it live, or in the evening.

I'll go and attend to my blood pressure now.

J. STEPPUTAT,
Via email.

Brotherly love

Sir,

I feel that I am probably one of the few Eye readers to be able to occupy pedants corner on issues concerning Big Brother so I felt it necessary to contact you. In Street of Shame (1141), you referred to the winner of Big Brother 6 as Anthony Hudson. It is in fact Anthony Hutton, as in "Taxi for Hutton".

Yours truly,
MICHELLE WILEMAN,
Via email.

Rotten verdict

Sir,

Rotten Boroughs is being too harsh on the Standards Board for England. It is inevitable that a complaints procedure will be used by some to bring petty or vindictive complaints, especially in its early years. Investigations have to be gone through to sort the chaff from the wheat, and councillors should be able to take this in their stride.

Rotten Boroughs seems unaware, or to have forgotten, what an appalling position honest councillors and concerned electors were in before the SBE was created. Large numbers of parish and town councils, and not a few principal authorities, were dominated by bullies who intimidated enough of their fellow councillors to be able to ignore laws and regulations.

The introduction of an independent regularity body has been a breath of fresh air. Many of the bullies, and the downright corrupt, realised the game was up and fled straight away, while others have been cowed.

Yours sincerely,
CHRISTOPHER PADLEY (a town councillor for 18 years),
Market Rasen, Lincs.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Kabul**

from Our Own Correspondent

WE IN Afghanistan have heard a lot of strong words about democracy of late – one of the more bearable side-effects of America's efforts to drive Islamic fanatics from our soil. But if our parliamentary and provincial elections earlier this month were democratic – give or take a bit of intimidation and fraud and a dozen murders – there was nothing new about many of the knaves who contested them.

Unreformed communists, their old enemies the mujaheddin and everyone's old enemy the Taliban crawled out of the woodwork and asked us to put them back in power. Given all the wars they have caused in the last quarter of a century, claiming well over a million lives and forcing millions more to flee the country, it was a galling sight. But not for our president, Hamid Karzai.

Most of us think he's a decent enough chap, but maybe he's losing touch, hidden away in his palace fortress terrified of assassination. Before the election, 207 candidates were accused by the UN of running private armies – a democratic no-no, you might think – yet the government disqualified only 32 of them from standing and some of the most unsavoury didn't even feature on the long-list.

Take one of Karzai's most trusted advisers, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a serious bad guy. Back during the Soviet occupation, he and his chum Osama bin Laden started guerrilla training camps to supply fanatics to fight the Russians and also in Bosnia and Chechnya. A few years later, when OBL was kicked out of Sudan, it was Sayyaf who invited him back to Afghanistan.

You might have expected Karzai to be more squeamish when choosing his friends: according to different human rights groups, Sayyaf is directly implicated in the killing of civilians during the civil war that erupted after the Russians left in which hundreds of thousands died and Kabul was flattened.

Meanwhile, in the mosques of eastern Logar province, a violent place teeming with angry Talibs, Mullah al-Haji Maulvi Qalamuddin could be seen campaigning for votes. In another life he was the Taliban's deputy-minister for vice and virtue, the cheerleader for some of the bumpkin zealots' looniest policies. It was his department that ordered the thrashing of unbearded men and women who refused to wear burkas. Girls' schools were closed, kite-flying was banned and adulterers stoned to death, with Qalamuddin the front-man for this lunacy: "Some people want to show their feet and ankles," he announced in 1997. "They are immoral women. They want to give a hint to the opposite sex."

He's changed his tune since, of course. On the campaign trail, he said he was against forcing women to wear burkas – even his own wife. "In Islam, women must conceal themselves, but burkas are not compulsory," he opined.

A fit 55 year old with a long, dyed-black beard, he expressed thanks to American troops for keeping a lid on the mayhem bubbling here: "It is sadly necessary to have foreign troops here in Afghanistan," he said. "God willing, we will one day have a strong army and police and then they can leave." In the meantime Qalamuddin vowed to work with the president to "improve our country in every way, economically, militarily, everything". Karzai was "a very kind man", he said; "I firmly believe he has a plan to get us out of our current crisis."

As for those jokers the Taliban, Qalamuddin reckoned they were misunderstood. "Every government has its good and bad points, and it's true we had a few failures," he said. "But then we had hardly any support from the international community or resources. That is why we didn't build any schools, or mend any roads, or pay salaries."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"To kill someone for stealing from you can sometimes be justified," Zhu Huimin told reporters outside a Beijing courtroom, "but to kill them for stealing something imaginary from you is ridiculous, as well as morally wrong. My son had only stolen a cyber-sword in an internet game, yet as a result, Qiu Chengwei broke into his house and stabbed him to death. Life imprisonment is not enough. We want Qiu to die, and die immediately."

Earlier, the Beijing court had passed a suspended death sentence (effectively life imprisonment) on forty-one-year-old Qiu Chengwei for the murder of twenty-six-year-old Zhu Caoyuan. "Qiu and Zhu used to play a popular online game called *Legend of Mir 3*," the prosecutor explained, "and Qiu had won a cyber-sword called the 'dragon sabre.' Zhu persuaded Qiu to lend the virtual weapon to him by transferring it to his computer, but he then refused to give it back, and sold it to another competitor for 7,200 yuan. Qiu complained to the police, but they told him there was nothing they could do, because the sword did not really exist, and there is no law in China to protect virtual property. So in frustration, Qui attacked Zhu at his home, stabbing him in the chest with great force and killing him."

Later, law professor Wang Zongyu of Renmin University called for a change in the law, saying "the armour and swords won in online games should be deemed to be private property, because players have to spend time and money to obtain them." But a lawyer for a Shanghai-based internet games company urged caution, arguing that "these cyber-weapons are just data created by game providers. They don't really exist at all." (*China Daily, 8/6/2005. Spotter: Mike Clark)*

– o –

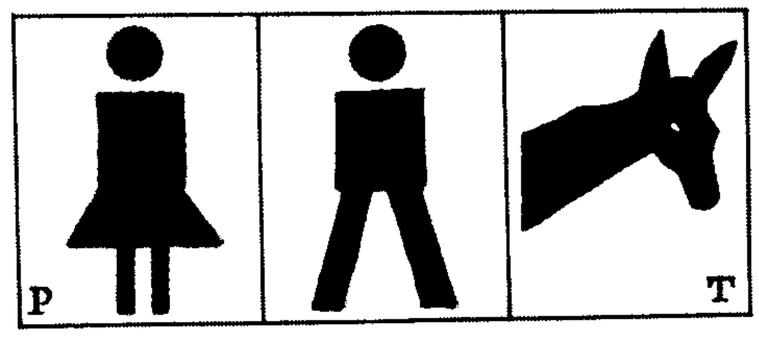
"Foreign customers are often surprised to see a line of people outside our showroom, each holding a live chicken under their arm," the owner of a car dealership in Bahrain told reporters, "but to locals, the sight is perfectly normal. Most people in Bahrain believe in evil spirits, so they always slaughter a chicken and splash the bonnet and badge of their new car with its blood, to allay the evil eye before they drive the car away. We allow them to do this, as part of our customer service, and in honour of the new owner. We even clean up afterwards. The problem is not so much with the blood from the chicken while they are performing this rite, because we can hose that away afterwards, although the windscreen wipers are sometimes a bit tricky. No, the real problem is when the chicken escapes, and the whole showroom is turned upside down as we try to catch it and kill it in front of the car. There's blood everywhere, and you don't want that in a showroom." (Alwasatnews, 21/6/2005. Spotter: no name)

– o –

"You were one of a group of men involved in drug smuggling," Lord Justice Hooper told Joseph Augustine in the Court of Criminal Appeal in London, "and you helped to set up a safe house in St Peter's Street in Bedford. The purpose of this flat was to allow drug mules from the West Indies to hide out after travelling to Britain, until the drugs they had swallowed had passed through their system.

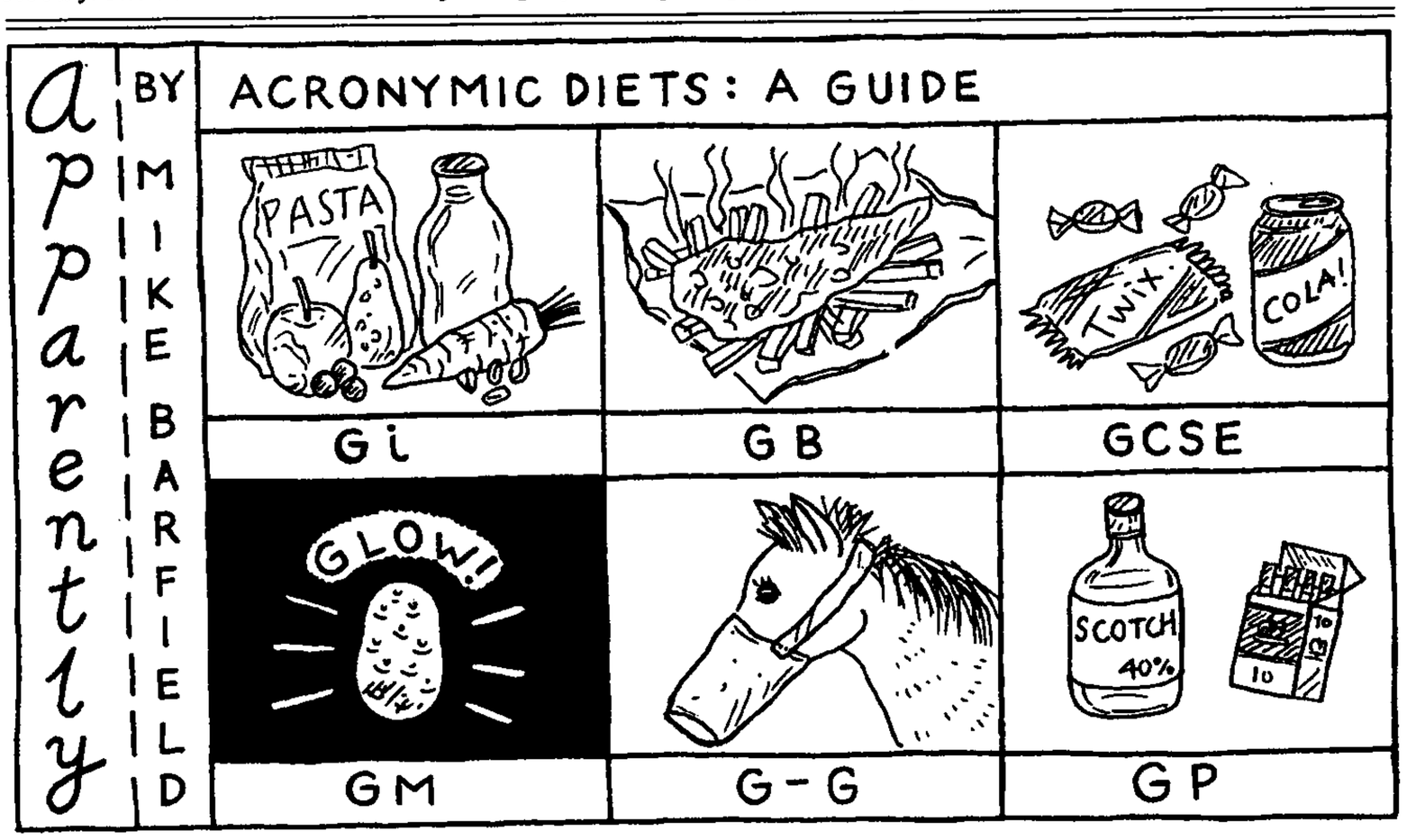
"In September 2003, you were looking after a drug mule, who had swallowed a kilogram of cocaine before leaving Trinidad. When the £50,000 payload you were expecting did not appear, you and your gang became impatient, and began force-feeding the smuggler with prune juice. You then resorted to what have been termed 'extreme measures,' such as inserting a broom handle and a carving knife into his anus, in an attempt to extract the drugs, although these attempts also failed.

"The man later escaped from the flat, and was found by neighbours, crawling in the street with various objects protruding from his anus. The cocaine was subsequently removed from



his belly by surgeons in hospital. Police then raided the flat, and found what has been described as 'a fully greased-up Hoover,' with which you had tried to suck the drugs out of the mule's bottom. They also found several electric toasters, which you have admitted were also part of the unsuccessful extraction process, although it remains unclear what use they would have been. You were subsequently convicted of smuggling cocaine at Luton Crown Court, and jailed for five years.

"You are now seeking leave to appeal on the grounds that the jury acquitted you of possession of the drugs, and that this was inconsistent with their guilty verdict on the smuggling charge. However, we see no reason why the two verdicts should be regarded as logically inconsistent, and therefore dismiss your application for permission to appeal against conviction." *(Bedfordshire on Sunday, 19/6/2005. Spotter: Garrick Alder)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And in this week of the annual parish outing, when we all go off together to the seaside at Brighton to take stock and to plan the year ahead, it is obviously my job to tell you all where we are going.

It's what we call a 'mission statement', from the Latin words *'missio'*, meaning 'a mess' and *'statementum'*, meaning 'the state that we're in'!

So let's begin with what we're not going to do. Let's get the negatives out of the way first, shall we! The first thing we are NOT going to do is to go back to the bad old days of the past, as some of the older people in the parish would like us to do!

And not just the old people, either! There are some people closer to home (well, close to *my* home, anyway!) who still seem to be hankering after those comfortable old certainties of yesteryear that the rest of us left behind a long time ago!

And no one knows better than me how tempting it is to get a round of applause at the outing by singing the old hymns and preaching the old sermons!

But, hey, I'm Tony, remember? A modern vicar telling it like it is, not like it was! We're living in 2005, you know, not 1926, or wherever else certain people think we should be going back to.

It's all very well to drone on in a sanctimonious Scottish accent about the old values, the old dogmas and the old creeds (y-a-a-a-wn!!!).

But that's hardly going to sort out the problems of a modern church trying to go forward in the fast-changing world of today! Look, in this life we all have to accept that there's a congestion charge, and we all of us just have to pay up and drive on (thanks for that clever image to our friend Mr Livingstone!).

And talking of Mr Livingstone, it would be nice to see you here in church, Ken, from time to time, rather than in the new mosque, where I gather you've lately become rather a celebrity!

Anyway, that brings me to my second point in my 'To Do' list of things that we are NOT going to do. Whatever a lot of people in the parish may have been saying, I can tell you that we are NOT, repeat NOT, going to 'cut and run'!

I am referring, of course, to all those fainthearts who are calling for us to desert our good friend the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons, and to abandon his great crusade to make the world a more dangerous place. *(Is this right? D. Hill.)*

I was even accosted by our friend in the wonderful new enlarged Tesco (where the

golf course used to be) – standing next to the new 'Cheese 'n' Home Loans Counter, Buy One, Get Me Free' – saying, in his usual unhelpful way, "Why don't you admit it, Reverend? You got it all wrong, didn't you?".

"Why don't you just cut and run, Vicar?", he shouted, as I accidentally pushed him into the bags of charcoal lining the 'BBQ and Personal Finance' aisle.

And there's that phrase again – 'Cut and run'. It's oh-so-tempting, isn't it, when faced with life's difficulties, to look for the quick exit, the easy way out!

But, you know, the easy option is very often the wrong one. It may be an old-fashioned word, 'wrong'. But I'm afraid it's the only one which will do in this context.

Anyone remember those old-fashioned phrases, such as 'In for the long haul', 'Sticking at it' and 'Seeing the job through'? Because that, my friends, is exactly what your vicar's planning to do.

So that when, in years to come, future generations of Albionians look back on our time, they will say, 'Remember the Rev. Blair? He didn't cut and run! He didn't listen to what everyone said. He saw the job through!".

In fact, I've composed a chorus that you can all sing on the coach on our way home from the seaside:

"Don't cut and run,
See the job through.
Stick to your gun,
It's got to be true."
(Repeat)

Words and music T. Blair.

Or, as our good friend Mr Mandelson so neatly put it on his business cards, *"I'm a fighter, not a quitter"*.

Doesn't Peter speak for all of us, with those brave words? I know he speaks for me!

Yours (to the end) Tony

KIDZ KORNER

- Have you heard this latest joke doing the rounds of the St Albion Primary School Playground (shortly to be our new Tesco car park)?
- *Q: Is the Vicar in denial over Iraq?*
- *A: No, he's in de Tigris and de Euphrates!*
- (Thanks to Mr Bremner for this one! T.B.)

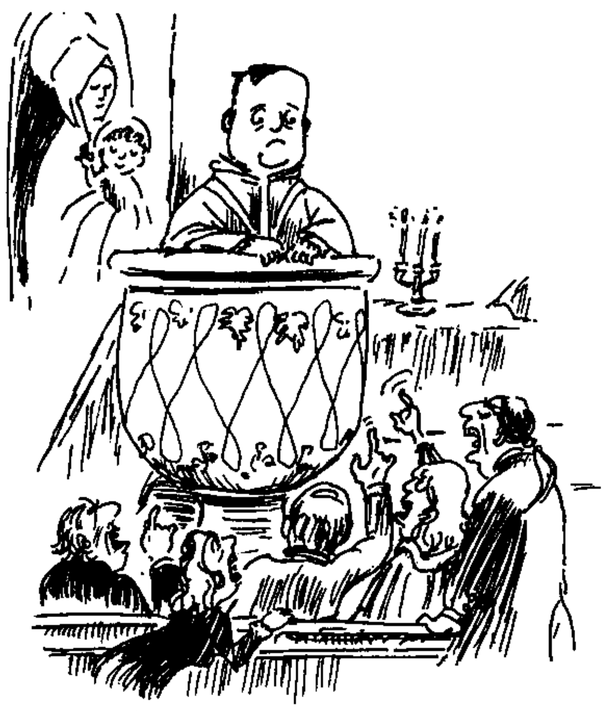
Congratulations!!!

We were all delighted to hear our good friend Mr Kennedy, minister of the United Reformed Liberal Democratic Church, frankly admitting to his congregation that he had made an awful mess of leading his flock and was really not up to the job!

Of course, many of us have known this for ages, particularly with his fondness for the bottle and his pathetic attempts to win popularity by becoming a father rather too late in life!

But it is always good to hear someone owning up to their failings, and on that score, we must give Mr Kennedy his due for being ready to admit what a hopeless failure he has been! Well done, Charles!

The only sensible course for him now is to cut and run! T.B.



Poor Mr Kennedy makes a Charlie of himself! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

To Remember In Your Prayers

- Mr Lance Price, who many of you will not have heard of, but who used to work at the vicarage helping out Mr Campbell with preparing this newsletter.

Unfortunately, Mr Price seems to have had some sort of nervous breakdown and, no doubt as part of his therapy, has seen fit to write a 'book' about his years working in a lowly capacity behind the scenes here at the vicarage.

I think the title of his book, 'My Years At The Vicarage Photocopier', tells us everything we need to know! Telling lies is never very nice and can get you into a lot of trouble – not that I would know! Anyway, let us pray that Mr Price is able to enjoy to the full the '30 pieces of silver' he has received for his 'memoirs', as he attempts to start a new life in France with his male 'partner'. T.B.

Love Is Blind

by top romantic novelist DAME SYLVIE KRIN

THE STORY SO FAR: The newly-unattached Minister for Pensions seeks solace for his broken heart in the fashionable West End nighterie 'Jezebels'.

Now read on...

"WHAT are you having, mate?" The suave Australian barman in the t-shirt emblazoned with the club's logo shouted above the throbbing music that was the hallmark of Mayfair's most fashionable discotheque.

This was not the old David's scene at all. A far cry indeed from the back-to-back houses of Sheffield of his childhood with the outside latrine where his Nan used to have a bath full of coal. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

No, this was the new David. The suave, sophisticated man (and dog) about town, perfectly at ease with the aristocratic coterie of Sir Max Burberry's drink and dancing venue for the moneyed beautiful people of the night. Their braying voices wafted across the room, mingled with the sounds of the club's trendy anthem, Chris de Burgh's 'Lady In Bed'.

"I said, what are you having, mate?" The debonair drinks server from Down Under repeated his question, puncturing David's wistful reverie.

"A pint of Boddington's and a bowl of water for the dog," he ordered hurriedly.

"Strewth, mate! That's no way to talk about the ladies in this joint. Although, between you and me, cobber, you are pretty much on the money."

Shane gave the former cabinet minister a conspiratorial wink and then jerked a thumb at a nearby table full of elderly former debutantes drinking Bacardi Breezers and discussing school fees.

David listened with wonder as the fashionable voices pierced the smoke and the disco din.

"And Rupert did terribly well in his GCSEs..." "My dealer comes round on a bike as if he were delivering pizza, ha ha ha..." "Who's that dancing with Araminta? Isn't it that ghastly Greek chap who writes in the Spectator?..." "...Oh my God, have you seen the scruffy, bearded chap at the bar? How did he get in here?"

David bristled and took a sip of beer.

"Don't take any notice," soothed a soft voice, arriving suddenly at his shoulder, and David could smell the delicate, musky aroma of 'Parfum de Floozie' by Duchamps.

Delicate fingers touched his hand. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before? Your face looks very familiar."

Once again, David swelled with pride at all he had achieved in life and all he had become.

"You probably saw me on the Andrew Marr on Sunday show, talking about pensions reform. I'm often on television, you know."

His new companion, a stunning blonde girl in her late twenties, moved closer to him, flushed with excitement as she realised she was in the presence of the man who would one day determine at what age she would be able to retire from her job at the Estate Agents.

"You're David Blunkett!" she gasped.

"The very same," he said, imagining he was at least as suave as the rest of the nightclub's legendary clientele. There was Sir Andrew Neil, showing off his latest vest and baseball cap to an exotic companion. There was Sir David Frost falling asleep in a corner over a glass of Rio Tinto. But it was *he*, David Blunkett, who was the centre of attention...

"I'm Gilly Northern," she cooed, "and I'm the assistant regional manager of Callard & Bowser Properties. We do short-term lets, long leases, freehold... you're not looking for anything are you?"

The question resonated in David's mind as he removed the paper umbrella that the barman had thoughtfully put in his glass of ale.

Was he looking for anything? Was he semi-detached? Might he need an extension? As if to echo his thoughts, the strains of Dodo's classic single 'Life To Rent' filled the dancefloor...

"EXCUSE me, sir," a gruff voice intruded on the intimate tête-à-tête at the bar, "I must ask you to leave."

The dark-suited bouncer towered menacingly above the lovestruck former Labour leader of Sheffield Council.

'What do you mean?" he stammered. "Aren't dogs allowed?"

"The dog's fine. But there's a no beards rule here. Sir Mark is particularly insistent on it. He doesn't want people thinking Jezebel's is full of old gits trying to pick up blonde totty half their age..."

The next thing David knew, he was out in the cold night air, sitting on the hard pavement of Berkeley Square.

Somewhere a church clock struck two and a nightingale sang its eternal love-lorn refrain. But what was that? Something wet and warm nuzzling against his cheek... Was it his faithful four-legged friend once again? Or could it possibly be...

(Find out in the next instalment of 'Love Is Blind' unless Mr Blunkett gets an injunction and all further episodes are cancelled)

© Sylvie Krin 2005.

WHAT YOU CAN BUY AT THE GREAT MAXWELL HOUSE CLEARANCE SALE

● 1 Life Jacket (unused)

POLLY FILLER

SO the male medical establishment has decided in its infinite (or should that be 'infantile'?) wisdom that women should not put off having children until they are older. Oh, pur-lease!!! Obviously useless men don't want women to have careers because then we won't have time to look after them as they sit around all day watching Extreme Pro-Celebrity Sudoku with Natasha Kaplinsky and A.A. Gill. So what could be better in the great male conspiracy against us working women than to have "wifey" (or "partnery"!) having her sprogs young and staying at home rather than establishing herself as, say, a top columnist and best-selling author of *Easy Mummy! – Further Collected Dispatches From The Front Line Of Modern Motherhood* (Johnson and Pearson, £12.99).

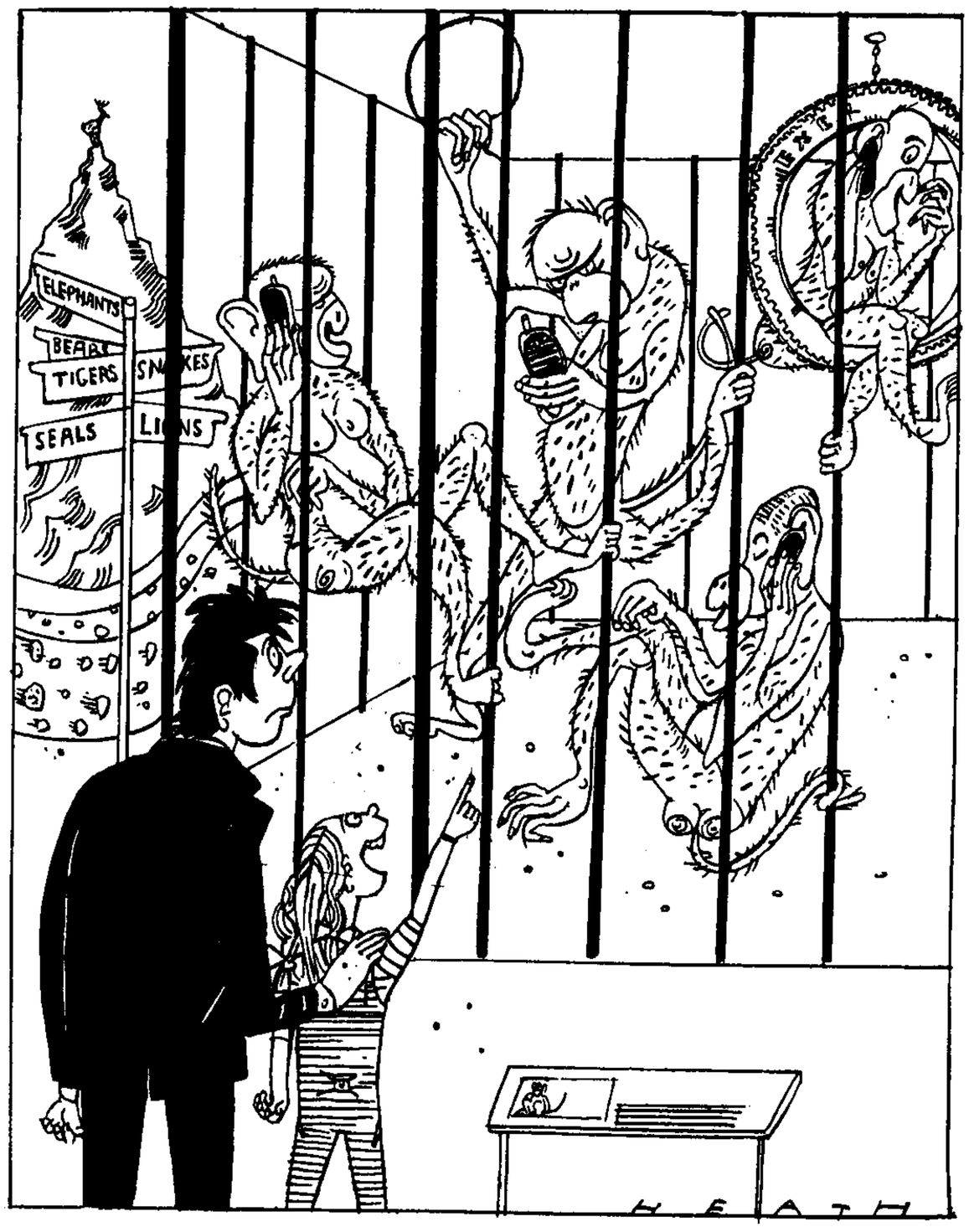
WELL, let me ask this simple question on behalf of so-called having-it-all mums everywhere: If women are obliged to have children in their early Twenties then who on earth are we going to get to be our nannies?

It's hard enough to get decent girls as it is – we've just said goodbye to Chi Po from China who seemed to think that 35p a week wasn't enough to supplement her board and keep, even when she put Simon's underpants in the DVD player rather than the washing machine! Honestly! What do they teach these girls in rural villages nowadays?

But imagine if Chi Po and all her ilk were *having* children instead of looking after ours very badly. Where would we be then?

You see... *men*, they never think things through!!

© Polly Filler.



Blimey, I've No Idea What To Say

Beano Boris analyses the new problems posed by the escalation of the insurgency in Iraq

CRIPES. I mean, blimey. Did you see those pictures of the chaps getting out of that tank, all covered in flames? Crikey. That's not very nice, is it?

I mean, don't get me wrong. I was one of the first to start cheering when our lads went in. I even went to Iraq, I think. Big place. Lots of sand. Chaps with towels on their heads. Anyway, it all seemed tickety-boo then. At least, that is what I was told by Brigadier 'Squiffy' Squiffington, who would know because, not only is he in charge out there, what's more, he was at school with me.

But, no sooner was my back turned than, golly, the whole place is swarming with swivel-eyed malcontents, chucking milk bottles full of petrol all over the nearest tank.

Phew! That's not exactly the point, is it? I mean, didn't we go in there to help Johnny Iraqi enjoy a bit of freedom, democracy and all that stuff? And now he's trying to set us on fire.

I blame that blighter Blair for getting us into this mess in the first place, and anyone who supported him. Whoops! Cripes! Blimey! etc.

© *The Daily Beanograph.*

BLOG WATCH THE BERLINER IS BORN

At Guardian Unread's exciting new weblog, staff chronicled the dramatic birth of the Berliner

Sunday 3:37pm Cheers go up around the office as page 94 of Society Guardian is re-formatted. The Jobs in Social Services page looks fantastic!

4:11pm Spontaneous applause greets the initial layout of the Sudoku page with its bold use of black and white newsprint. Amazing!

4:23pm Alan Rusbridger personally signs off the "In This Section" section. Journalists break into frenzied dancing. Bells ring out across London. Truly history is being made.

5:27pm Guardian Blog page completed. The new-format Guardian may be small but there's still room for this vital feature. Astonishing!

7:14pm The paper is completed and triumphant Guardian staff proceed in open top bus from Farringdon Road to Trafalgar Square to accept the cheers of hundreds of tens of Guardian fans. They sing the moving anthem "Maybe it's because I'm a Berliner, that I love the Telegraph so".

Monday 9:34am First copy of Berliner arrives in chip shop to spontaneous applause from staff. Every-one in the Happy Haddock agrees that it is a new dawn for newspaper publishing.

IRAN NUCLEAR WARNING

by Our Foreign Affairs Staff **W.M. Deedes**

AMERICA and Britain today gave a stark warning to Iran that unless it curbs its nuclear ambitions they will do nothing.

"The fact that, unlike Iraq, Iran actually will have weapons of mass destruction means that both Tony and I are committed to doing nothing, for as long as it takes, until it's too late," warned George... *(Cont. p. 94)*

HURRICANE RITA
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that Hurricane Rita constituted a major threat to the United States on a scale unparalleled in recent times. Readers may have inferred from our coverage that the entire southern seaboard would be destroyed utterly by huge winds and giant waves causing massive loss of life and dead bodies floating everywhere. Headlines such as "Rita Worse Than Katrina", "Millions Flee Killer Hurricane" and "Help! We're All Going To Die" may have led our readers to believe that we considered that Hurricane Rita would not only lead to record human casualties but would also trigger a major economic crisis due to the shutting down of all US refineries and the consequent leap in the price of oil to $500 a gallon.

We now realise **that Rita was little more than a light squall and bore little relation to her lethal predecessor Katrina. A sum of money has been paid to a charity of Rita's choice to mark our regret at any damage to her reputation as a bona-fide innocent tropical storm.**

KNACKER – 'THE DAY I NEARLY RESIGNED'

by Our Crime Staff
Phil Jails

INSPECTOR Sir Ian Knacker of the Yard candidly admitted today that he thought seriously about resigning following the killing of an innocent Brazilian electrician in Stockwell underground station.

"It is every chief policeman's worst nightmare," he told reporters. "It was my darkest hour. I looked in the mirror and asked myself if I should do the honourable thing and resign."

Sir Ian continued, "But the answer came back – *'No, Knacker, you mustn't'*. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to give up my highly-paid job and admit I had made a terrible mistake."

He concluded, "But how much harder it is to stay on and pretend nothing has happened."

STOP PRESS

● Knacker Shoots Kate Moss In Drugs Crackdown **94**

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

KATE MOSS

Do spoons play an important part in your life as one of Britain's top models?

You'll have to see my lawyer.

NEXT WEEK: *Kate Moss – Me And My Moss.*

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the 50th Anniversary of ITV and the Fish Finger

So. Congratulations
The Fish Finger.
You are 50
Years old.

With your cod
Fillet and easy-to-cook
Crispy crumb coating
You are the
Nation's favourite.

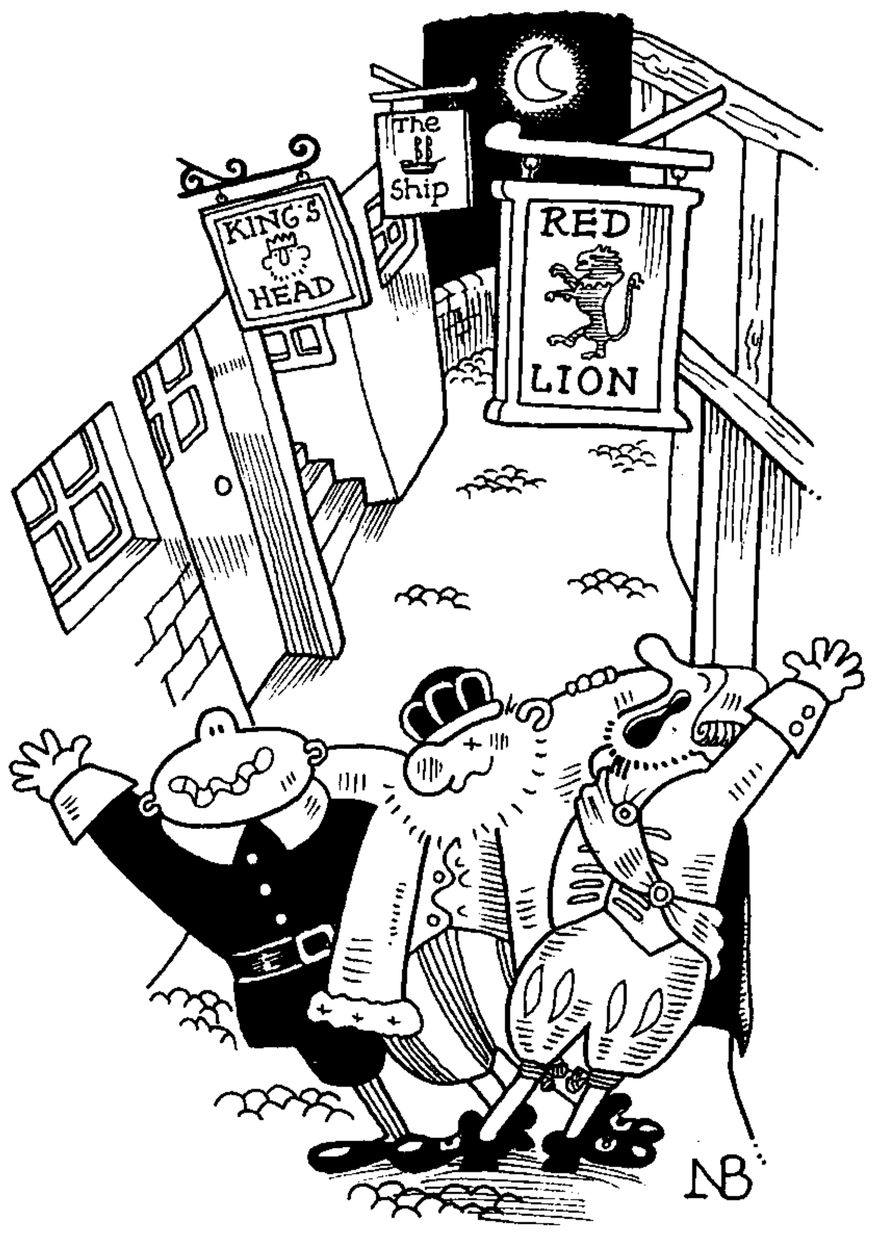
Unlike ITV.

E.J. Thribb (17½ minutes conventional oven or 15½ minutes fan-assisted)

"This area here is the ghetto..."

LABOUR CONFERENCE SPECIAL

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Old King Cole was a merry old soul.
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his mates at ten to eight
And they drank 'till half past three.

The Church Of England

An Apology To All Muslims Everywhere

We, the members of the Church of England, would like to offer our deepest apologies for our silly bishops, who can never resist the temptation to make meaningless, sanctimonious and patronising gestures, such as apologising for the invasion of Iraq as if it was a Church of England-inspired crusade against the entire Muslim world rather than a *(cont. p. 94)*

ON OTHER PAGES: No apology from CofE for allowing greedy phone-mast companies to invade parish churches **94**

"He's terribly advanced for his age!"

'WE WERE BORING FIRST' Claims Neasden Boss

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Internet Cafe Downloading Last Night's Results

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations by the revelation that football was boring.

Up and down the country, gates were falling as the outbreak of goal famine in Britain's top clubs was keeping people at home watching paint dry.

Said an FA spokesman, who wished to remain nameless as he was on the couch with his secretary at the time, "The zero-zero scoreline will be the death knell of football as we know it."

KNEE JERK REACTION

But, in a remote corner of north-west London, an angry Ron Knee, 59, the veteran manager of Neasden FC, lashed out at the Premiership, "How dare the likes of Mourinho and Wenger take the credit for making football boring, when we have been leading the way for decades."

"Our goal tally of nil over the last fifty years is a record which speaks for itself. To see the big boys trying to get in on the act is, to my mind, frankly sickening."

ZERO-ZERO TOLERANCE

Neasden's fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) were quick to support their ashen-faced supremo.

"The day the Squirrels start putting the ball in the back of the net," they said, "is the day I burn my season ticket to Neasdenbridge and give away my replica No. 10 shirt to Oxfam."

Ron Knee is 59.

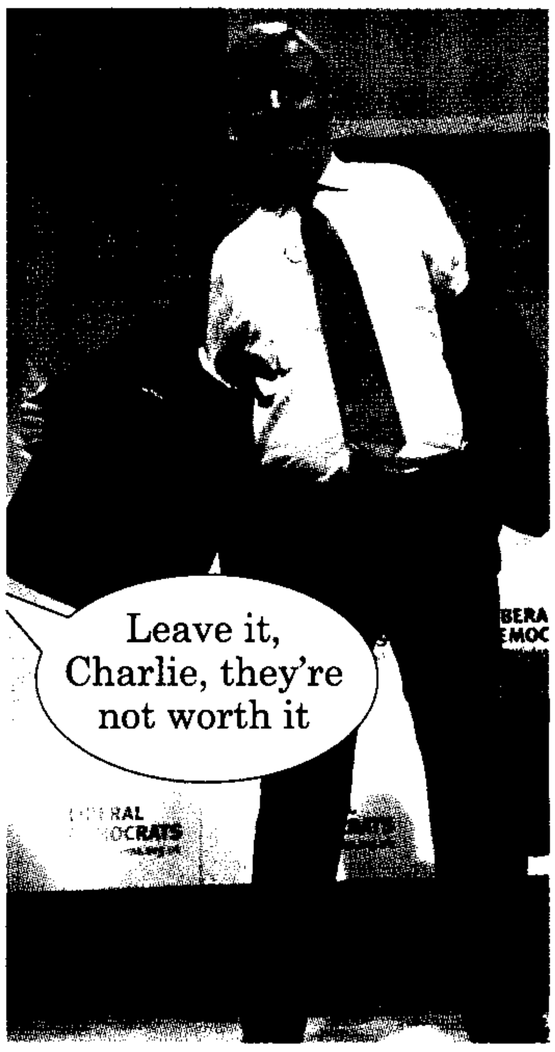
Late Result

Corby Trouser-Press Charity Shield (first leg)

AFC Neasden 0
Dollis Hill 0

(game abandoned after 63 minutes for being too boring)

CHARLES KENNEDY AT ODDS WITH GRASS ROOTS



POETRY CORNER

Lines on the impending divorce of Sir Mark Thatcher and Ms Diana Bergdorf

So. Farewell
Then the marriage
Of Mrs Thatcher's
Only son
And Diana Bergdorf,
Daughter of a
Texan millionaire
Car dealer.

She was a
Good catch
For the wayward
Baronet.

But eventually she'd
Had enough and
Bergerd-orf.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

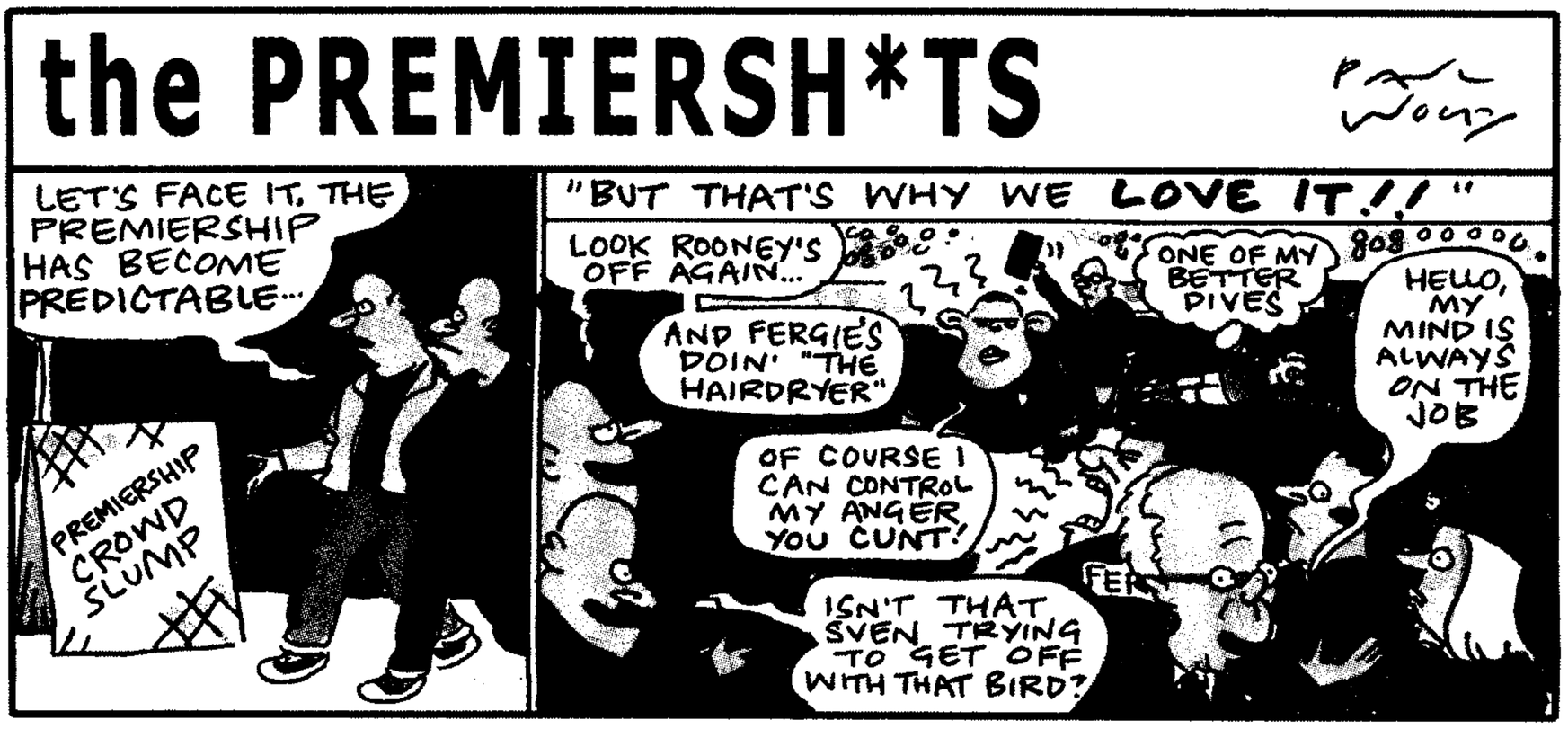
by the late
GODFREY WINSOME
(with older readers in mind)

IN the autumn of her days, a little old lady sits bent over her bottle of whisky *(Surely 'embroidery'? Ed.)* in her flat in Chester Square.

What can she be thinking, as she gazes sadly down on a copy of the Sun newspaper, with its poignant headline 'Mark To Split From Texan Heiress'?

What emotions must be coursing through her heart, as she tearfully pours herself another glass of *(Cont. p. 94)*

the PREMIERSH*TS


LET'S FACE IT, THE PREMIERSHIP HAS BECOME PREDICTABLE...
PREMIERSHIP CROWD SLUMP
"BUT THAT'S WHY WE LOVE IT!!"
LOOK ROONEY'S OFF AGAIN...
AND FERGIE'S DOIN' "THE HAIRDRYER"
OF COURSE I CAN CONTROL MY ANGER YOU CUNT!
ISN'T THAT SVEN TRYING TO GET OFF WITH THAT BIRD?
ONE OF MY BETTER DIVES
HELLO, MY MIND IS ALWAYS ON THE JOB
FER

KATE MOSS ADDICTION LATEST

by Our Fashion Staff **Cocaine Chanel**

THERE were mounting fears last night about the future of the British press, when it became clear that it has become hopelessly addicted to Kate Moss.

What started as an occasional experiment has now become a full-blown habit with journalists "doing hundreds of lines" a day. In fact, some papers cannot get through a single page without an enormous "hit" of Kate Moss.

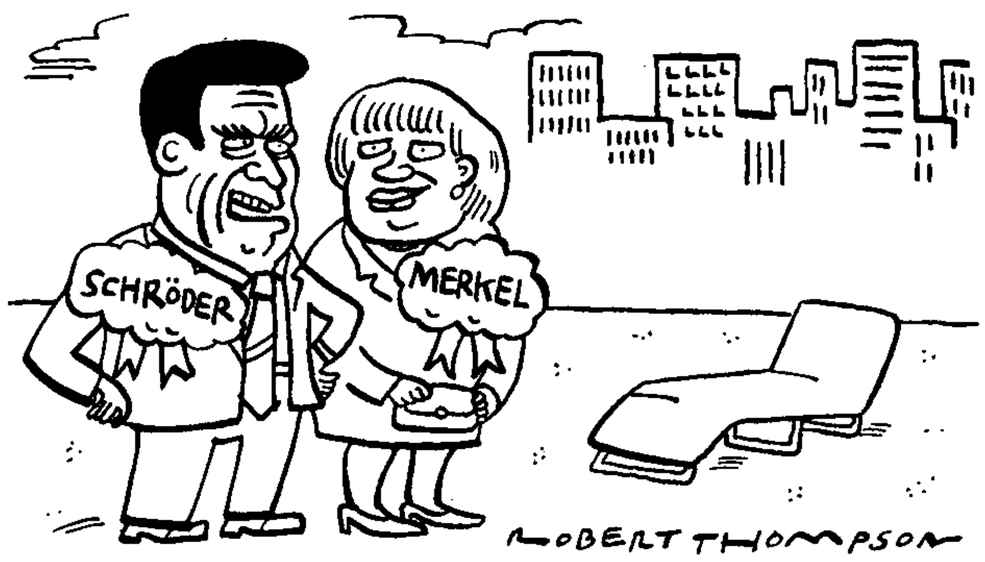
Said one observer, "It's a tragic spectacle. Editors go into the toilet looking tired and depressed and then come out minutes later excitedly demanding features about Kate and crackhead Pete."

Gets Up Your Nose

He continued, "The trouble about this addiction is that you lose all sense of reality – you forget that there is a world out there – and all you think about is where you're going to buy your next 'fix' of what they call 'Katie'."

Snorts Pages

He concluded, "The worst thing is that it's so easy nowadays. You buy it cheap, cut it up, and lay it out in the Mirror or possibly the Sunday Mirror."



"I know, first one to the sun lounger!"

Those German Election Results In Full

Dresden South

Frau Margareta Thatchler *(Christian Democrat Party)* **5003**

Herr Vorsprung durch Technik *(Free Democratic Party)* **5003**

Herr Alan von Rusbridger *(Social Democratic Berliner Party)* **5003**

Frau Windt Turbein *(Green Democratic Party)* **5003**

Herr Douglas Baader-Meinhoff *(New Left Non-Christian Anti-Democratic Terrorist Party)* **5003**

No Result.

GLENDA SLAGG

THEY CALL HER HURRICANE GLENDA - THERE'S NO ESCAPE!

■ THREE CHEERS for Kate Moss!?! So she sniffs coke, takes crack and holds amazing orgies in top hotels! So what? She's a party girl!?! She likes a bit of fun, for gawd's sake, after a hard day on the catwalk. What do you expect her to do, Mr Noozman?!? Sit at home with a pot noodle, watching Corrie?!? You gotta be joking!?! I say this – Cokehead Kate has got the courage to stand up and then fall down!?!?

■ KATE MOSS!?! What a disgrace!?! Listen, love, you're not just a model!?! You're a role-model!? Geddit?! What sort of a message are you sending out to the kids, with your sniffin' and a-whiffin', your snortin' and cavortin'?!? You should be ashamed of yourself. I'll tell you what, love. Here's a tip from Auntie Glenda – instead of going out a-cokin' and a-pokin', why don't you stay at home with a pot noodle and watch Corrie?!?

■ POOR LITTLE Kate Moss!?! Just because she's been out enjoying herself, the fashion house bosses are queuing up to dump her. Our cuddly Kate has made the high street labels billions, with her waif-like figure and her drop-dead looks!?! Oi, you, Mr Chanel, Mr Burberry and Mr H&M!?! Give Katie her job back. And why not throw in a hefty pay-rise as well, so she can afford more drugs!?!??!!

■ HATS OFF to Mr Chanel, Mr Burberry and Mr H&M?!?! At last the fashion industry is cleaning up its act and sending crackhead Kate a-packin' and a-sackin'!?! It's high time this dope-crazed dolly was made the "new face of the dole queue"!?! Geddit?!!?

■ *HERE THEY are – Glenda's September Sizzlers:*

● **Mark Oaten**, the Lib Dems' "Mr Moderniser". I'll give you a tax rise any time!!?!

● **King Jung-Il**, the sexy dictator fron North Korea. OK, so you've given up your nukes but I hope you've kept one weapon for Auntie Glenda!?!!?

● **Chris Ofili** – crazy name, crazy Tate Gallery, for giving you a load of money for that elephant dung!!?!

Byeeee!!!

THE TIMES

Blair Attacks 'Anti-American' BBC Coverage

by Our Media Staff **Bibi Basher**

TONY BLAIR has reiterated his criticism of the BBC's 'anti-American' tone in its coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

"This is far from the first time BBC News had done this. On January 20th this year they chose to broadcast images from President Bush's inauguration showing George Bush taking the oath of allegiance for his second term in office.

"I mean, how humiliating and anti-American is that?" said the Prime *(Cont. p. 94)*

SUPERMODELS KERBER

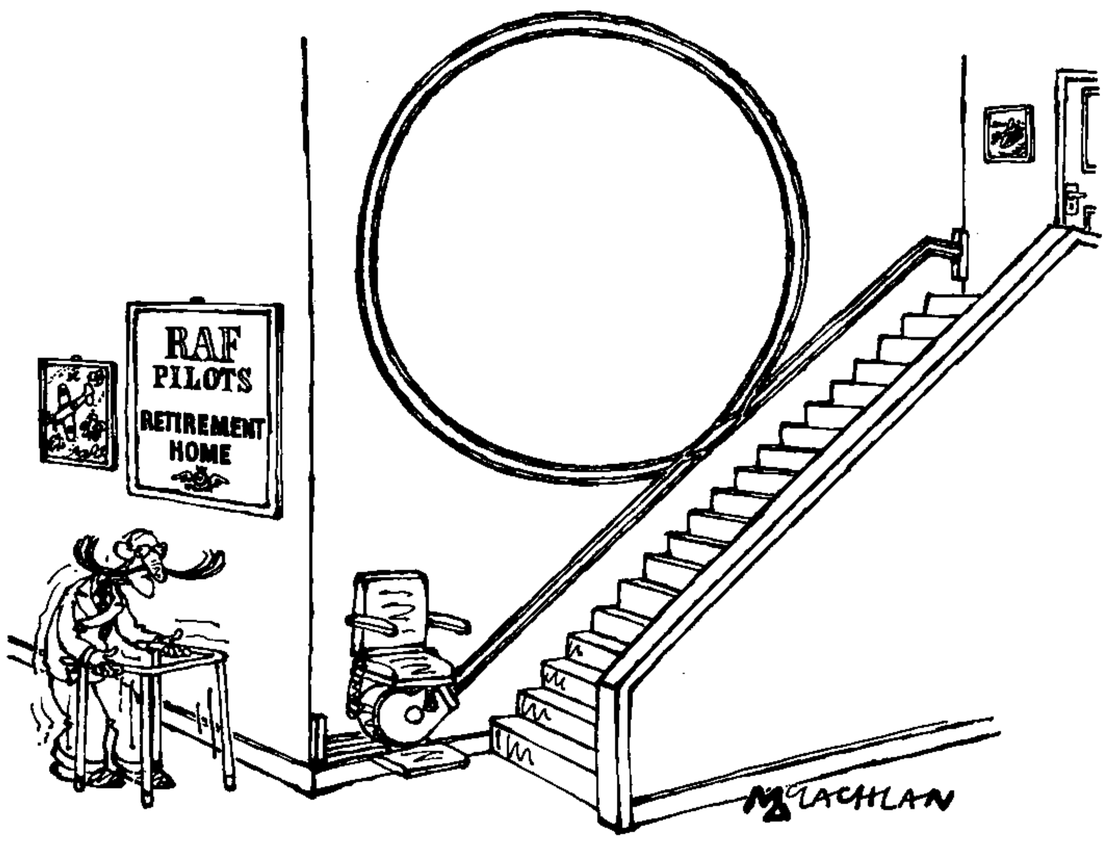
DESIGN HOUSE
I'M SO GLAD WE FOUND OUT ABOUT KATE MOSS WHEN WE DID!
YEAH
NOW WE KNOW WHERE TO GET SOME GOOD GEAR FROM! YEAH!!!
snort! snort! snort!
Kate Moss goes down to the Police station....
GIVE ME "CRIMINAL" DARLING, ...THAT'S NICE, NOW GIVE ME 'WHACKED OUT ON DRUGS' ...THAT'S LOVELY DARLING...
CLIK CLIK CLIK
32510981

Powerful and moving re-creation of the last days of the crazed dictator Adolf Blair, as his dreams of world domination crash in flames around him.

Becoming more manic by the day, we see him sending more and more young men to the front line to try and win a hopeless war.

Accompanied only by his devoted mistress, Eva Booth,and his hated propaganda chief Josef Campbels, he eventually realises that the game is up – committing suicide by handing over the reins of power to his long-time companion, Gordon von Braun.

'A searing insight into the heart of evil'
– The Berliner Guardian



The Daily Telegraph

September 30th 1843

NEW DISABLED STATUE 'A DISGRACE'

by Our Man In Trafalgar Square **W.F. Deedes**

The new statue erected in Trafalgar Square has attracted a storm of protest, with objectors claiming that its portrayal of a disabled figure is "sensationalist" and "in poor taste".

The statue, designed by controversial artist William Railton, depicts a one-armed man who is partially blind.

"Railton is just trying to shock people and make headlines," said one critic. "His statue does the disabled no favours at all and ruins the look of the whole square."

Asked for a reaction, the subject of the statue, Admiral Horatio Nelson, was unavailable for comment on account of being dead.

ON OTHER PAGES

Will His Highness The Prince of Wales ever become King? page 2

Is the fetching Miss Lillie Langtry secretly addicted to laudanum? page 3

The Mousetrap – tickets available page 94

THE TIMES

Mary Ann Bighead

IT IS A TRUTH universally acknowledged that I am much cleverer than anyone else, and would therefore never begin a column with a cliché like 'it is a truth universally acknowledged that I'm much cleverer than anyone else'.

Sadly, many of my fellow columnists aren't as clever as I am and have fallen into the trap of using Jane Austen's opening sentence to start their columns.

If my daughters Brainella (7) and Intelligencia (3) began their columns with such a trite and tired formulation, I would strike it out immediately with my trusty sub-editor's pen and send them both to bed without allowing them to translate Thucydides from the original Greek into Mandarin! Shame on you, everyone else, for not being as clever as me!

©Mary Ann Bighead, The Times.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

aren't i marr-vellous?

Mr Drivel Notebook

hi there, readers, it's me again, mr drivel, the only guinea pig in the world to have his own column in the daily telegraph... haven't i done well for myself? and guess what my subject is for today, as per usual, it's a sad little creature with funny ears whom nobody cares about... yes, andrew marr... now i know most of you would like me to write about something serious but i can't because i'm contracted to the bbc and they won't let mr drivel comment on anything that might be remotely interesting... sorry to disappoint you but i can tell you one thing... i may be only a guinea pig but i get paid a lot more than a guinea for this *(You're not fired. Ed)*

DIARY

MAX CLIFFORD

It's not something I like to go on about, but I'm a very compassionate man. Call me naive, but I have a powerful social conscience and I find helping others hugely rewarding. As I say, it's not something I tend to go on about, but if I can do anything to offer my support to the poor and the needy, then I most certainly will.

I'm sorry, I can't help it – I believe in sticking up for the underdog. But it's not something I go on about. Take the other day. I was walking along the street when I saw a little old lady, a tiny little old lady, being set upon by a gang of youths.

I couldn't have looked at myself in the mirror again if I hadn't done something. "Break it up, lads!" I said. They were good-looking boys, too. I turned to the old lady. People like that make my blood boil. "Now what did you do to provoke these innocent young lads?" I said.

Blimey, she'd let herself go a bit. Well, you're crying out to get beaten up if you don't make the best of yourself. A smile doesn't cost anything, does it? And had she never heard of lipstick and a halfway-decent hairdo?!

The lads stood around looking down at their feet. I've always hated bullies, and I knew then and there – call it instinct, if you will – that this old lady had bullied them into giving her the once-over. My heart went out to them – smashing lads, led down the garden path by a ruthless old harlot.

"Was it something she said, lads?" I asked them. "You can tell your Uncle Max. Was she showing you disrespect or abusing your lovely hard-working mums or any little tiny tots in your family – bless 'em?" It makes my blood boil, it really does, the way these snooty old ladies go around stirring up trouble for themselves.

But I'm a compassionate man (though I don't go on about it).

"This time I'm going to let you off," I informed her. "I'm not going to involve my friends in the police, and for now I've decided not to give the gentlemen of the press all the stuff I have on you. But you're not to go around provoking young lads, do I make myself plain? Do I? Well, we'll say no more about it. Now be off with you!"

As she scuttled away, I turned to her poor victims. They needed a bit of TLC. Those knuckles of theirs looked dreadfully sore. Call me a great big softy, but I wanted to cheer them up. "Ever heard of a band called The Beatles, lads?" I said to them. "Not a bad little group, one or two nice tunes. But when I first met them they were nothing.

'Work your magic on us, Max!' their lead singer – terrible scruff – begged me. His name? Johnny Lennon. So I pulled a few strings. Before the end of the week, they were being chauffeur-driven in their own Bentleys to the best hotels in the world, all expenses paid. And the rest, my friends, is history."

I advised those lads to get themselves scrubbed up and go out and purchase a couple of guitars and a drum kit. Then I'd lay on the publicity snaps with a night out on the town with my client Rebecca Loos of David Beckham fame.

After a word in the ear of my good friend X Factor presenter Simon Cowell we'd have them at the top of the charts in time for Christmas.

Chuffed? You bet they were! Ever heard of a singer called Frank Sinatra? I discovered him the same way. And Frank didn't do too badly for himself, now did he?!

My sense of humour has been described as incorrigible. I love a practical joke. I can't see a block of cement on a scaffold without feeling the urge to push it onto a passer-by! And you should have seen the look on the face of one well-known TV celebrity when I told him the police were coming round in a couple of minutes to arrest him for kiddie porn! You've got to laugh, you really have!

I never tell secrets about my clients, but I had Primrose Shipman, wife of the late Dr Harold, in the office the other day (if you knew what I know, you'd realise he was a first-rate doctor, lovely bloke, very caring, very considerate, on the shortlist for the Nobel Prize – but the snooty, pompous patronising medical establishment were jealous, weren't they?). Anyway, Primrose is trying to reinvent herself with a new diet book to promote, so she's looking for a whole new change of image.

She was letting things get on top of her, so I slid the old box of Kleenex Extra Strong across in her direction and said, "Have a good weep, love – that's it, all better, let it out. 'Scuse me a minute." So while Primrose was having a right old sniffle, I got on the phone to my friend Simon Cowell of X Factor fame.

"I've got a lovely bubbly lady with me here for you to escort to Stringfellow's this evening, Simon," I said. "Believe me, there'll be a helluva lot of press interest, particularly if we can persuade Jade Goody in her thong to join the two of you at a table with bad boy former MP Ron Davies. And any chance of David Starkey?"

Result? 324 column inches on Plucky Primrose's night out with the stars, with the result there's been a helluva lot of interest from the high-ups in her hosting her own knitting show on satellite.

It's not something I go on about, but I'm a man of tremendous compassion.

Put it this way. I can't see a goldfish sloshing around in a bowl of water without wanting to pick it up with my own hands and put it on dry land.

Over the years, I've helped make a great many people's dreams come true.

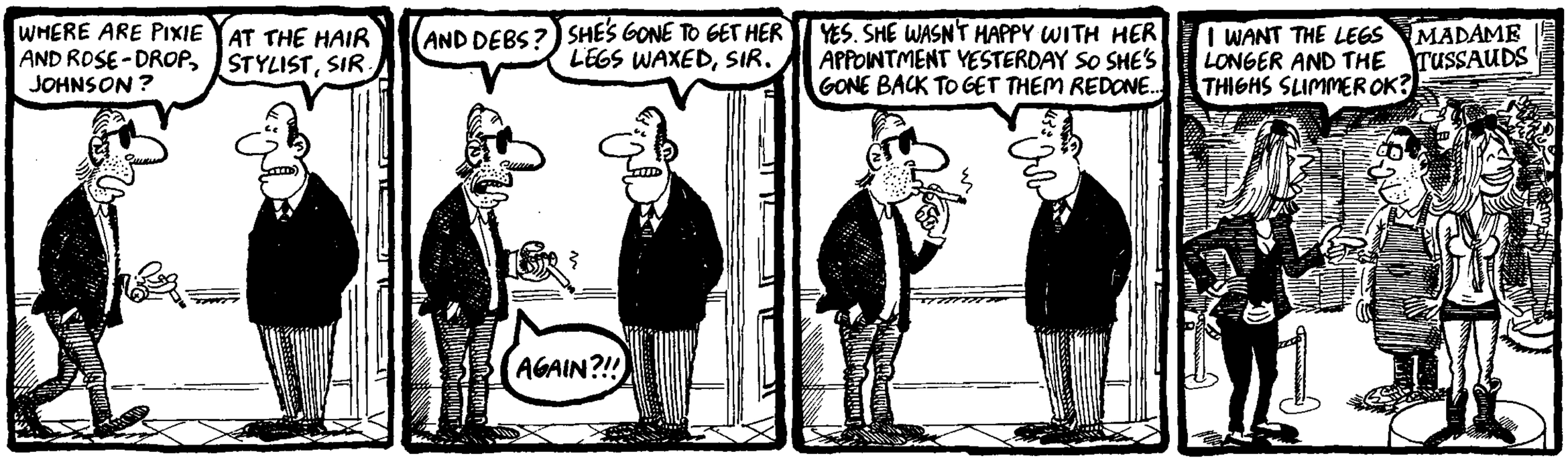
Ever heard of ITN's Trevor McDonald? Ever heard of The Rolling Stones? Ever heard of Bill Gates? We're talking of living legends like stylish socialite Bienvenida Buck, top farmer Tony Martin, and tragic mum Mandy Allwood, and that's just for starters.

Ever heard of Abu Hamza? When he first came into my office, Abu was a nobody. But the guy had a dream. He knew I'd worked my magic on his friend Osama back in the '90s and now he wanted a bit of the action for himself. So I said to him, Abu, I said, Abu, you've got to buy yourself a great big hook, you've got to grow a bushy beard and then you've got to poke your own eye out. Now we're talking, Abu! Lastly, you've got to conquer that shyness of yours! Find yourself a platform, Abu, take a deep breath, and say what's on your mind!

Ten years on, he's one of the best-known faces around. Only now he claims it was all his own idea! That's stars for you! But at least I can look at myself in the mirror and know I've done my bit for society. Though it's not something I go on about.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


WHERE ARE PIXIE AND ROSE-DROP, JOHNSON?
AT THE HAIR STYLIST, SIR.
AND DEBS?
SHE'S GONE TO GET HER LEGS WAXED, SIR.
AGAIN?!!
YES. SHE WASN'T HAPPY WITH HER APPOINTMENT YESTERDAY SO SHE'S GONE BACK TO GET THEM REDONE...
I WANT THE LEGS LONGER AND THE THIGHS SLIMMER OK?
MADAME TUSSAUDS

Literary Review

Hit and myth

Shalimar the Clown
Salman Rushdie
(Cape, £17.99)

HAVING more or less cleaned out the myth-kitty in his last two novels, the dumbed-down popped-up *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and the embarrassing gloat-fest of *Fury*, Salman Rushdie has had to return for inspiration to his pet subject: the political and cultural conflicts of the Indian sub-continent. This is no bad thing. In its depiction of the tragic fate of Kashmir, *Shalimar the Clown* contains a healthy dose of the savage indignation that so invigorated Rushdie's early fiction.

It is almost, but not quite, a return to form. What spoils it is, once again, a fatal lack of self-control. It is not enough for Rushdie to tell a tale of two rival villages in the arcadian vale of Kashmir; to celebrate the difference and distinctions of Kashmiri culture; to show the sorrows and joys of love and war; and to pour his curdled scorn on the Indian, Pakistani and separatist forces who, in fighting over the disputed territory, make a desert and call it quits.

Such unities of time, place and character would not be sufficiently extravagant for the leading purveyor of multi-culti myth-mash. So there must be a convoluted globe-trotting time-spanning tangle of sub-plots and love-plots and death-plots and the whole panoply of fairy-tale magical-realistic overkill. Only then can the novel live up to its billing, as the embossy-regal cover blurbs it, as a "majestic narrative" which "captures the spirit of a troubled age".

Thus we begin in Los Angeles in 1991, with the assassination of Max Ophuls, a retired American diplomat, by his former driver, the Kashmiri-born clown of the title. The murder takes place on the doorstep of Ophuls' daughter India, the by-blow of an affair with a Kashmiri dancing girl back in the 1960s when Ophuls was the US ambassador to India.

We then move to post-partition Kashmir to learn that Shalimar's real name is Noman and he is not so much a circus performer as a travelling player, whose acting skills enable him not just to take part in village entertainments but also, later in the story, to adopt the necessary disguises of a globe-trotting Islamic terrorist. While in Kashmir, we get our background briefing on the history and culture of that lost "earthly paradise" of peaches and honey. We also get to meet the Hindu dancing girl, Boonyi, with whom Shalimar was betrothed as a teenager, after a touching little Romeo-and-Juliet love match saga, but who later fell for the suave middle-aged charms of the visiting American diplomat.

Just how Ophuls came to be so sophisticated is then explained in a long digression about wartime Alsace, another culturally miscegenated territory bullied and fought over by its bigger neighbours. This gives Rushdie his cue for yet more galloping historical summary. Ophuls is Jewish and his family printing business, threatened by the arrival of the Nazis, enables him to work as a forger and undercover agent in the wartime resistance. We then move to blitz-torn London, where Max meets and marries his wife Peggy. After the war Max is reinvented as an American diplomat and all-round "maker of the modern world". Peggy turns a blind eye to those affairs with local women at each of Max's postings by which we are meant, perhaps, to interpret American foreign policy as a process of serial seduction, betrayal and abandonment. (The Indian and Pakistani forces in Kashmir are, by contrast, simply rapists.)

If this makes the book sound rather worthy, that is certainly not how it reads. There are even some quite interesting personal touches. Not the bit about the elderly cultured gent and his adoring Asian babe lover, which we had quite enough of in *Fury* (see *Eye* 1036), but the bits about how not to get assassinated by psychopathic stalkers and what it's like being on the run.

But however good its occasional highlights, they cannot salvage the book as a whole. Part of the problem is that Rushdie dispenses with narrative tension by giving us the result, so to speak, at the beginning of the book and then telling much of the rest of it in brisk historical summary with only limited bits of real-time drama. It is thus neither a whodunnit, nor for very long a whydunnit, since we know the killer was motivated by revenge rather than ideology; the only remaining mystery about this sprawling narrative or "Kash-miriad" is how Rushdie can manage to spin it out to 400 pages.

Rachel papers

In The Fold
Rachel Cusk
(Faber £10.99)

IF ANY further proof were needed of what a hoity-toity miss young Ms Cusk here can be on occasion it could be found in a recent number of the *Guardian Saturday Review*.

Here the author of *A Life's Work* and *The Lucky Ones* descanted loftily and not, it must be said, unpatronisingly on the experience of gracing a readers' group in the Bristol area with her sagacious presence. Sadly her fellow novel-fanciers seemed not to have benefited from all this lordly expertise and the following week brought a pained letter of the "We were having a nice time reading our books until this scary woman turned up" type.

Ah well, the urge to reorder the turbulent world that lists and settles around us was ever the novelist's birthright, as Ms Cusk herself might say. Even as far back as 1995's *The Temporary*, critics were getting a handle on the Cusk aesthetic. Its signature marks, they respectfully declared, were a prose style of quite vertiginous dazzle, all manner of brainy apercus on the vagaries of humankind and a complete inability, at any rate in the realm of figurative language, to know where to stop. The characters were as overwrought as the syntax; and the general effect resembled Henry James fast-forwarded in time and told by his agent that the really sharp operators were writing failed relationship novels set in Cricklewood.

The current dispatch from Planet Cusk ploughs this furrow to yet more scintillating effect. Its focus is an exceptionally tedious bohemian family named Hanbury, whose members sit preeningly around on their West Country hill-top drinking kir and having all-night parties. Enraptured by this civilised insouciance, visiting undergraduate Michael preserves them in his mind as a symbol of the gay, good life. Later, having found his own variant on the Hanburys – the Alexanders live "in a condition of sustained embroilment", bless them – and married their spiky daughter, he returns to find most of his late-adolescent illusions irrevocably shattered. As in previous Cusk outings, everyone is vaguely unpleasant, wholly self-absorbed and unreasonably talkative, while failing altogether to disguise the fact that the author is much less interested in them as people than the opportunity they offer to exercise her talent for the eye-catching simile.

A few low-key examples follow. "Her face, when he let her go, was like the open face of a flower." "He was like a big, exuberant, bad-mannered amphibian, or a laughing, androgynous cleric." "His long, attenuated body, from which a voice of unexpected power and solidity issued like the proboscis of a predatory insect." Elsewhere, there is mention of "the strange candour of the saturating grey light", a girl who manages to be "moon-faced" and "farouche" at the same time and a flock of sheep that don't baa but whose disharmonious and plaintive voices lift constantly in ululation.

There is a pattern, it turns out, to the outsize clumps of figurative foliage that decorate these flights of fancy. It consists of a good idea extended and refined in a manner so loopy and artificial as to destroy the promise of what went before.

This conspicuous overdoing it is a shame, for at her best – that is, when she calms down and stops trying to make every sentence add up to ten – Cusk can be horribly shrewd and very funny (an overdressed woman who "looked as if she was wearing the national dress of a small, high-spirited country"). As to what she should do next, I'd suggest a children's book about the exploits of Vernon the Vole with no sentence running longer than ten words. The chances are that it would be rather good.

Books & Bookmen

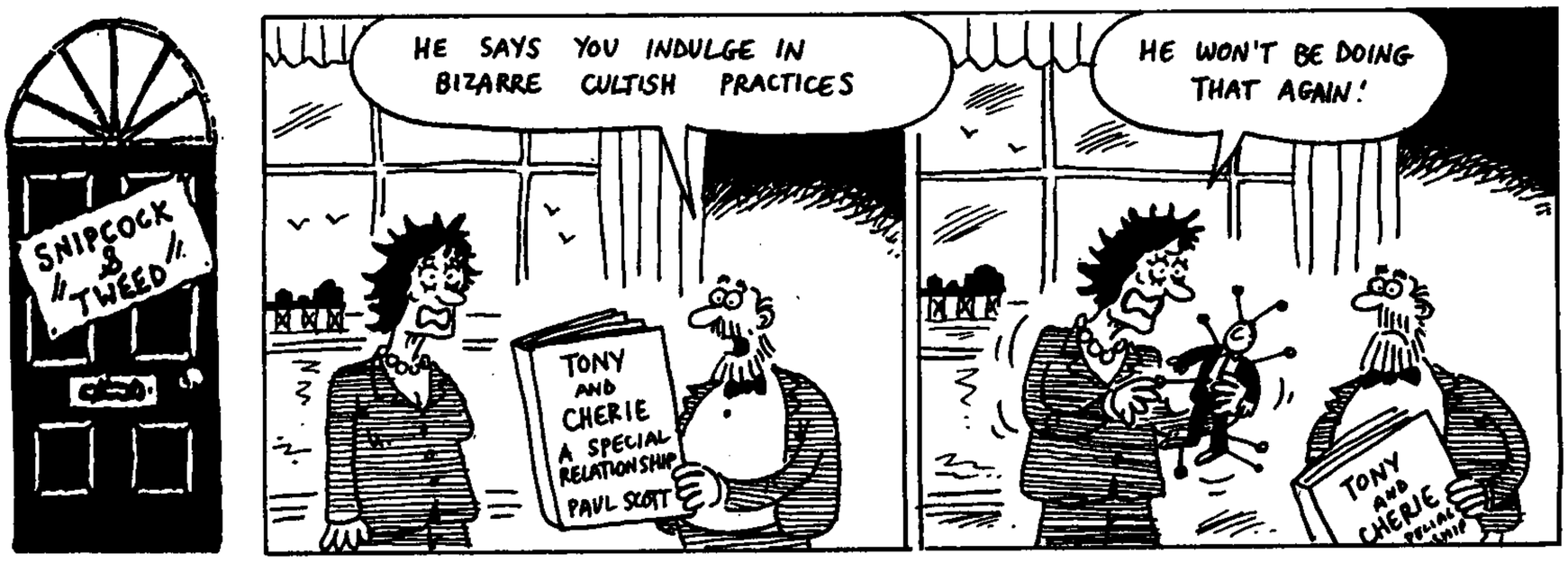
■ *HMV, which already owns Waterstone's, won't be taking over Ottakar's without a fight, it seems.*

The opposition does not come from James Heneage's management buyout team, which has raised as much cash as it can, but from the Publishers' Association and the Society of Authors, who want the office of fair trading (OFT) and competition commission to examine the deal, and from MP Glenda Jackson.

The recent appointment of Gerry Johnson, formerly of cash-and-carry firm Booker, as Waterstone's md gives an indication of the way any combined Ottakar's/Waterstone's will be run. It might have sponsored a major prize for many years, but, as a wholesale grocer, Booker has more in common with Tesco and ASDA -- whose discounts and narrow ranges have shifted the focus of book retailing -- than it does with either of the book chains.

So, it'll be more of the centralised buying that Ottakar's decided not to embrace (all books to be bought on the say-so of Scott Pack at HMV, whose Friends Reunited entry reads "My life is better than yours"), more authors being marginalized due to the "harsh realities of the marketplace" (ie it's easier to flog a few heavily-promoted titles in bulk than stock a comprehensive range), and more suicidal competition with supermarkets.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
HE SAYS YOU INDULGE IN BIZARRE CULTISH PRACTICES
TONY AND CHERIE A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP PAUL SCOTT
HE WON'T BE DOING THAT AGAIN!
TONY AND CHERIE

Pseuds Corner

Ricky Ponting is Shane Warne's mum and the auntie of every man on his team. He is maternal, a vixen protecting her cubs, a goddess claiming her children back from the mouth of hell. He's secure in his femininity.
CATHY GALVIN,
The Times

The film performs what Europe has always been pining for: the integration of its conflicting religious impulses. It is the fantasy unity of Catholicism, Protestantism and Romanticism. It is Hegel with songs.
THEO HOBSON revisits 'The Sound of Music', *Guardian*

I don't tone down my look when I go to work. For me, the Tatler office, where I'm fashion director, is a place to play. I always wear hats – Philip Treacy, inevitably. There is no other milliner. My rule of thumb is, if I'm wearing a baroque hat, I'll team it with a very simple dress. I've got another hat that's smothered with Swarovski crystals. It covers most of my face to just under my nose. Froufrou with that would never do.
ISABELLA BLOW,
Independent Magazine

'The ontological function of eBay as the actualisation of consumers' imaginations', Janice Denegri-Knott and Mike Molesworth, Bournemouth Media School
From the Essex University 'Cultures of eBay' conference programme

While in the studio recording the album last year, the band came up with the title "A Bigger Bang", reflecting their fascination with the scientific theory about the origin of the universe.
From the Rolling Stones' website

This article considers the increasing popularity of showering in the UK. We use this case as a means of exploring some of the dimensions and dynamics of everyday practice. Drawing upon a range of documentary evidence, we begin by sketching three possible explanations for the current constitution of showering as a private, increasingly resource-intensive routine. We begin by reviewing the changing infrastructural, rhetorical and moral positioning of showering. We then consider how the multiple and contingent constituents of showering are arranged and re-arranged in and through the practice itself [continues]
Abstract of 'Explaining Showering: a Discussion of the Material, Conventional and Temporal Dimensions of Practice', by Martin Hand, Elizabeth Shove and Dale Southerton, Sociological Research Online

CONTRIBUTORS: Tim Martin, Alison Powell, Harry Davies, Stephen Hill, Ibbertson Woolfardisworthy, Huw Jones.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

IRAQ SMUGGLING

Lloyd's booze cruise

BEFORE the invasion of Iraq the British government was keen to counter criticism that sanctions were hurting Iraq's poor and sick.

Former foreign minister Peter Hain made the point that at a time when Iraqi children were starving, Saddam Hussein's regime was still importing 300 million cigarettes, 38,000 bottles of whisky, 230,000 cans of beer, 40,000 litres of vodka and 19,000 bottles of wine a month. "This is decadence on a truly obscene scale and contrasts again with the misery which so many of the Iraqi citizens are suffering," he said.

Indeed it was. But Hain ignored a crucial fact: the imports were being made under the nose of the City of London's most ancient and venerated institution, Lloyd's Register, the shipping industry overseer.

This marks Lloyd's Register's second controversy involving the oil-for-food programme in Iraq. In June Joseph Stephanides, a senior UN security council official, was sacked for allegedly giving Lloyd's improper help to win the contract to inspect the "humanitarian" goods being shipped to Iraq. He was supposed to have tipped off British diplomats at the UN to a cheaper French bid. The diplomats then advised Lloyd's Register to reduce its own tender to secure the contract.

Following publication of the 800-page report into the UN's oil-for-food programme by Paul Volcker, former chairman of the US national reserve bank, Britain's role in what was in fact an immense smuggling operation is now detailed.

Most of the "fag and booze" shipments went through the Jordanian port of Aqaba under the guise of foodstuffs. It was Lloyd's job to keep watch on the food shipments and ensure that Iraq did not use them to import weapons of mass destruction.

The Jordanian government, angry that the UN multinational naval force kept intercepting ships bound for Jordan on mere hunches, had instead appointed Lloyd's to oversee the shipments which, under UN trade restrictions imposed after the first Gulf War, should *not* have included alcohol or tobacco. Nevertheless the report says that in one three-month period from August 2000, Lloyd's allowed Jordan to release to Iraq more than four million cigarettes, 2,500 tonnes of tobacco and huge quantities of alcohol.

It seems that while Lloyd's had informed the UN 661 committee that was supposed to be overseeing the oil-for-food programme about the illegal shipments, the committee had already washed its hands of responsibility. It had "endorsed a suggestion by the UK representative" that Lloyd's should be allowed to release shipments of foodstuffs to Iraq without first seeking approval from the UN. So for five years the green light was given to the shipments to Saddam's palaces, adding to the suggestion that UK and US authorities were also happy to turn a blind eye to smuggling through Jordan because of its importance as a strategic ally in the Middle East. It is estimated that Saddam made some $2bn from illegal kickbacks through the oil-for-food programme.

Lloyd's Register's chairman David Moorhouse says this is the first he has heard of allegations regarding tobacco and alcohol smuggling and he is investigating. He has also denied any wrongdoing over the awarding of the inspection contract. Although he admitted Lloyd's had received information from British diplomats suggesting it lowered its bid, he claimed that other firms were given this information too. "We have investigated these allegations thoroughly and as far as I can see we did absolutely nothing wrong." So that's all right, then.

CONSUMERS AFFAIRS

Protection racket

AS THE office of fair trading (OFT) prepares to investigate a "super-complaint" from the Citizens' Advice Bureau that payment protection insurance (PPI) is over-priced and mis-sold to people taking out loans, vastly increasing the cost of borrowing, how much do those flogging the policies actually make out of it?

Not one of the banks involved declares its income from this lucrative business in accounts, perhaps for fear of being rumbled. But one of them, Barclays, isn't content just to keep it hushed up: it also wants to avoid as much tax as it can on its huge gains. It does this by issuing the insurance from subsidiary companies in Dublin, where they pay tax at a friendly 10 percent rather than the British 30 percent rate. But this extra bit of greed enables anyone prepared to look up the companies' accounts on the Irish register to see just what a good screw PPI is for Barclays.

Barclays Insurance (Dublin) Ltd and Barclays Assurance (Dublin) Ltd between them issue all the policies. In 2003 they collected premiums of £498m while paying out on claims of just £64m. From this £434m haul, £125m was returned as commission to the British Barclays companies selling the insurance. In 2004 the Irish insurance companies had to get by on a mere £423m in premium income against claims of £65m (leaving £358m), with £107m coming back to the UK as commission. Barclays wouldn't discuss the figures with the *Eye*, commenting merely that "this product accounts for much less than the 10 percent of Barclays' profits that the media has quoted in the past". Indeed yearly returns on PPI of £300m or so *are* less than 10 percent of the bank's multi-billion total annual profits.

The OFT will decide whether such eye-watering margins are justified, while HM Revenue & Customs will no doubt spot that in these two years alone more than £100m in tax appears to have been dodged.

Electric shock treatment

CONSUMERS are being ripped off to the tune of £100m a year by the store card market, says the Competition Commission. But who dominates that market?

Step forward GE Capital, which controls more than half of a market it entered by acquiring the card business of high street retailer Burton in 1990. Now, according to the commission, it makes profits "persistently and substantially in excess of the cost of capital".

GE Capital is the financial services arm of the world's fourth biggest company, General Electric; and in a sign of the times now generates the bulk of the former engineering conglomerate's profits. So impressive is GE that, despite its profiteering in Britain, chancellor Gordon Brown invited chief executive Jeff Immelt to be a keynote speaker at his "Advancing Enterprise" conference earlier this year.

ASYLUM

Fast tracking

THE home office's enthusiasm for deporting failed asylum seekers is well known – but it could at least wait for the proper legal process to be finished.

A Bosnian army deserter seeking asylum in the UK was snatched from the streets of west London and deported to Dublin by immigration officials while a review of his case was still supposed to be pending.

Salih Terzimustafic fled the army in the early 1990s with post-traumatic stress disorder. He travelled across Europe, mainly on foot, passing through numerous countries en route to Ireland, before he came to the UK and claimed asylum.

Under European agreements the UK can send asylum seekers back to countries where they have previously applied for asylum. However, once a judicial review of his case had been requested in Britain, he should not legally be removed from the country until it is decided.

Earlier this year Mr Terzimustafic was taken to Colnbrook detention centre pending removal, where he refused food and used broken glass to cut himself. He was granted bail after an immigration tribunal court heard that the request for a judicial review had been lodged.

He was due to see a consultant psychiatrist on 3 September for a report on his mental state ready for the judicial review. However, he was deported to Ireland on 25 August. MEPs Jean Lambert and Caroline Lucas have been supporting his case. Lucas has written to home office minister Tony McNulty describing the removal as "irresponsible and immoral".

PRIVATE EQUITY

Fund and games

WITH the Gate Gourmet episode fresh in delegates' minds at the TUC in Brighton, Transport & General Workers' union leader Tony Woodley (pictured right) condemned the company's owner, Texas Pacific Group (TPG), as "a renegade venture capitalist company headed by American union-busting bosses".

But TPG is just one of a host of largely anonymous private equity groups buying up swathes of British industry, including many of the companies running public services under private finance initiatives. They are estimated to control one in five private sector jobs but are not subject to anything like the controls imposed on public companies (PLCs). They don't have to produce accounts or report on issues like directors' pay and are often based in favourable tax havens.

As Gate Gourmet employees know all too well, such cost-cutting regimes rarely have much regard for the workers. As the head of one of the biggest private equity groups, Steven Schwarzman of Blackstone, told the BBC earlier this year: "We can break up companies without having to worry about all the public company paraphernalia of doing so."

With employers – including parts of the public sector – able to wash their hands of huge numbers of employees, the TUC called for a return of legal secondary industrial action as a way to ensure that workers' rights keep up with business practice. But the government, and the Labour party conference, were not in listening mood. Before the Brighton conference, trade secretary and ex-union boss Alan Johnson even fell for BA chief Rod Eddington's line by describing the BA baggage handlers' walk-out as "nothing to do with their employer" – conveniently forgetting that "their employer" had flogged the catering operations to TPG in the first place.

Despite the threats posed to employee rights and the TUC's vocal opposition, some union pension schemes are only too keen to share in the enormous returns on offer from private equity groups. The Royal Mail and BT pension funds have between them put £250m of their members' money into a private equity fund run by Hermes (itself owned by the BT pension scheme).

All being well the BT and Royal Mail staff – most of them members of the Communications Workers' Union – will do nicely out of the arrangement. But comrades whose jobs move into the ruthless and unregulated private equity sector when the funds are used to buy up public companies might not fare so well. So much for comradely solidarity.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Let there be light

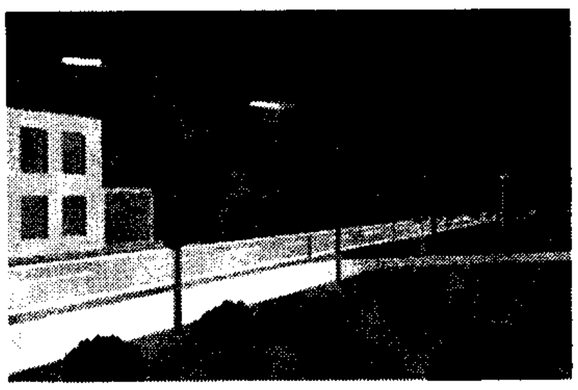
ACCORDING to her Cambridge University CV, senior research associate at the Institute of Criminology Dr Kate Painter is "*the* leading expert in the evaluation of… public lighting, CCTV and crime reduction". Since the late 1990s she has built a research, writing and award-winning international lecture circuit career showing how better street lighting can substantially reduce crime.

Most of her work is based on two original studies on estates in Stoke-on-Trent and Dudley: research funded by Urbis Lighting Ltd, "the UK's largest supplier of street lighting" (annual turnover about £25m). Dr Painter's current five-year research programme at Cambridge's Institute of Criminology is also courtesy of an Urbis-funded fellowship.

All of which is fine and dandy except that Dr Painter also happens to be "Mrs Urbis Lighting" – the partner of Patrick Baldrey, the company's chief executive, director and major shareholder.

Despite Dr Painter's research, better street lighting's role in reducing crime is *not* proven. The government has invested huge sums in both CCTV and lighting projects; but a confidential home office report recently leaked to the *Sunday Times* (the Crime Reduction Review ordered by Tony Blair to identify the most effective ways of cutting crime by 2008) is decidedly lukewarm on street lighting. It concludes: "While one home office meta-analysis of local evaluations suggests in some circumstances that street lighting could reduce crime, some studies showed no impact at all."

Dr Painter's fingerprints also happen to be on that "one home office meta-analysis". After completing her first five-year Urbis fellowship in 2000 (she is now on her second), she joined the home office's research department as "director for CCTV, vehicle crime reduction and intelligence-led traffic policing". Under her directorship, which lasted just over a year, the review on street lighting and another on CCTV were ordered.



One of the two authors commissioned to carry out the two reviews in 2002 (which never went to tender) was Prof David Farrington, Dr Painter's senior professor at Cambridge and co-author on some of the Stoke and Dudley studies. Just before she joined the home office, she and Prof Farrington wrote another paper based on the Stoke and Dudley research. It concluded that financial savings from reduced crimes substantially exceeded the costs of better lighting and that street lighting more than paid for itself in less than a year. These impressive figures (quoted on the Urbis website) were mentioned more than once in the home office street lighting review.

In fact accurate crime figures are notoriously hard to find. They can be dramatically skewed by, for example, one prolific burglar committing hundreds of offences. The 2002 home office reviews triggered a row both inside and outside the department, leading to a home office research manager who inherited responsibility for the reviews and shared critics' concerns about their integrity leaving her job. The issue was whether the statistical analysis applied to the review properly accounted for all the factors that come into play when trying to measure crime rates.

The reviews were examined as part of a cabinet office training programme on research and criticisms voiced there were passed to the home office. A major critic was Dr Paul Marchant, a university statistician, who after submitting detailed concerns to the home office said he was assured that the research would carry "a serious health warning". In fact an addendum was added which said that after taking his and another experts' statistical advice, a new analysis had been carried out. But the findings were the same. "The effect on crime are still statistically significant," was the verdict.

Dr Marchant, who has since published a statistical critique of the work, was staggered: "I don't know if street lighting reduces crime or it doesn't. All I am saying is that the review does not show that it does." (Dr Marchant also has a potential conflict of interest. As a member of The British Astronomical Association, he supports its Campaign for Dark Skies, which campaigns against light pollution. But he pays the association, rather than the other way round.)

All research, good and bad, can be tainted when potential conflicts of interest are not disclosed. While Urbis's funding is openly acknowledged on Dr Painter's street lighting research papers, she relies on her Cambridge credentials for magazine articles and her speaking engagements. Urbis describes her as an "independent" researcher on its website.

The *Eye* cannot pinpoint exactly when Dr Painter and Mr Baldrey started discussing street lighting in Uganda – and they aren't saying. Dr Painter herself challenged the *Eye* to come up with a wedding certificate to prove a home office-sourced suggestion that the pair had married abroad. While initially denying that any kind of relationship was flourishing with Mr Baldrey while she was at the home office, she later helpfully added: "Well, I don't see how anyone at the home office could have known about it, we were so careful."

Thus, on her own admission she and Mr Baldrey were an item while she was at the home office and before she took up her second fellowship. The home office declined to answer any questions about the potential conflict. Prof Farrington meanwhile said Dr Painter's private life was her own and that in any event she had denied "living with" Patrick Baldrey while he, Prof Farrington, was working with her on street lighting and while she was a civil servant. The home office decision to appoint him to do the review was logical as he and his co-author were already engaged in a similar review. "The published papers on street lighting by Kate Painter and myself were written to the highest standards of scientific integrity and were not influenced in any way by any person from the street lighting industry or anywhere else," he said.

NATIONAL TRUST

Monumental blunders

THE TROUBLE with asking people's opinion of you is that sometimes they tell the truth.

So pity the senior management team (SMT) of the National Trust which, at the end of 2004, commissioned a staff survey which found that only 15 percent felt "senior managers were in touch with what is happening at a grass roots level", and that only 25 percent felt "the SMT and the trustees were leading them in the right direction". Red faces all round.

Why are NT managers held in such low esteem? The simple answer is they are not very good. Take the "organisational review", the root-and-branch reform led by director-general Fiona Reynolds (pictured right). It has cost more than £9m in 2004 and 2005 alone. Some of this went on an attempt to create "territory directors" for different regions – a policy since abandoned. According to a recent memo from the D-G, the review "hasn't quite worked".

Neither has moving HQ from Queen Anne's Gate in Westminster to new £20m offices on old railway sidings in Swindon (*Eye* 1135). The new HQ building is called "Heelis" after the married name of early NT benefactor Beatrix Potter; staff were quick to rename it "Hellish". Despite a 20 percent staff turnover in the past year, with redundancies and many people choosing to leave rather than go west, those who did found there weren't enough places for everyone to sit down in Swindon. Back in London the Trust had to pay rent on its empty Queen Anne's Gate building, after failing to find new tenants. Meanwhile it had rented another five-storey building two doors away to house the policy wonks who had declined to go to Swindon.

While money has been poured down the drain on the one hand, on the other there are fears for revenue. Processing of members' subscriptions is in disarray, with thousands of applications for which people have paid not being processed. And the new "customer relations marketing programme" has been spewing paper across the nation – one member having received 29 identical computer generated letters. Customer services manager Anne Dixon has had to apologise (twice) in the in-house magazine for the cock-ups, while head of customer care Alex Youel is a mite embarrassed, given that his daughter Laura works in the membership department.

Another huge expense has been relocating the Trust's big cheeses – the eight SMT members who moved to Swindon received relocation benefits totalling £282,000 in 2004, and £211,000 this year, on top of their salaries. Reynolds last year received an extra £100,000 in pension and relocation benefits on top of her £110,000 salary.

The Trust's council, which has been seeking to rein in the SMT's spending for years, has demanded that £6m a year must be saved if the operational reserves drained by all the muddle are to be replaced. So managers have cut 250 jobs. At what Reynolds describes as "a painful time", the SMT has handled the sackings with due sensitivity. On the day those who were made redundant were clearing their desks in Queen Anne's Gate, they could see Trust communications supremo Ivo Dawnay and commercial manager John Stachiewicz outside in the rose garden drinking champagne.

BP IN COURT

Oil's not well

NEXT MONTH a small team of London lawyers will head to Colombia to take final statements from 60 *campesinos*, or farmers, whose livelihoods have been destroyed by an oil pipeline. They are preparing to launch an unprecedented human rights action against BP in the UK courts.

The case against the oil giant is not being heard in South America because the farmers' Colombian lawyer, Marta Hinestroza, has already had to flee the country having found her name on a paramilitary hit list. Jhon Morales, one of the farmers, was ambushed by four gunmen and shot dead.

The farmers say the oil giant paid them a miserly few hundred pounds for the land through which the pipeline runs and then reneged on an agreement to compensate them further for the damage it caused. Their main allegation is that the pipeline has cut across key water sources, causing soil to erode, ponds to dry up and harvests to be poor. In addition, Colombian army and paramilitary soldiers who are supposed to guard the pipeline from guerrilla attack have intimidated and driven away the locals.

BP, which led the consortium that built the 450 mile pipe, is not accused of involvement in terror tactics but is accused of gaining advantage from the methods used by the Colombian army and paramilitaries.

Does this all sound familiar? *Eye* readers will recall that BP is heading the consortium driving the massive Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, which is also beset by allegations of poor compensation and safety standards, along with human rights abuses.

Martyn Day, the London lawyer representing the Colombian farmers, says BP's failure to compensate adequately men and women who were once respected landowners but are now destitute, undermines its claim to behave abroad as it does at home.

BP says it always condemns human rights abuses and maintains that the landowners were fairly compensated during construction and that the land has been the farmers to use ever since. It claims that "third-party validation" from the Colombian environment ministry supports BP's case.

The campesinos' claim will be financial peanuts for BP and the oil giant is likely to pay more in lawyers' fees to try to defeat the farmers in court. So much for ethical investment.

Asbestos: Eye told you so...

CAMPAIGNERS against the development of 650 homes and a nursery on the site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory have received an apology from the developers, via a press release in the *Rochdale Observer.*

Michael Drogan, managing director of MMC Estates, which owns the land, was quoted: "We would like to apologise to local residents for the confusion and concern our actions have caused. We recognise that this has brought about a sense of mistrust and has undermined our ability to work with the community."

This is a departure from MMC's previous line that residents had made "ill informed and irresponsible statements" and had "a questionable agenda".

There was also an apology from Ian Kelley, md of MMC's partner Countryside Properties (Northern): "Following further investigations, we recognise that there has been miscommunication surrounding the levels of asbestos contamination across the site for which we would like to apologise."

In fact the company filed a planning application stating there was a "notable absence of asbestos contamination" when the site was riddled with the stuff – as revealed in March in *Eye* 1129.

POLICE 5

You've been framed!

WHEN student Jennifer Pope and two of her friends became embroiled in a melee after leaving a concert in London's Finsbury Park, they also found themselves in an altercation with several police officers, triggered, it seems, by a sudden police horse charge.

Jennifer, 20, panicked; and when she remonstrated after one of her friend's was hit and pinned to the floor, she too found herself surrounded by police, thrown against a wall, handcuffed and placed in a van with her friends to be taken to Tottenham police station.

She was accused of kicking a female PC and charged with assault and drunk and disorderly behaviour. The "drunk" charge was soon dropped when Jennifer, a chief inspector's granddaughter, offered to be breathalysed. She had not been drinking.

None of the trio had ever been in trouble with the police before and all three were incredulous at their treatment.

Fortunately Jennifer's father managed to get hold of CCTV footage of the incident from the local authority and this was produced in court. After a three-day hearing, all three were acquitted. The footage had shown Jennifer distressed and pinned to a wall but certainly did not show her kicking a WPC.

Jennifer made a formal complaint about the incident, their detention at the police station and the fact that after one of her friends was acquitted, one of the officers said in the courtroom in front of Jennifer's father: "Don't worry. We will get the them next time."

After studying the CCTV footage, the magistrates evidently preferred Jennifer and her friends' account of events to those of the nine police officers in court. But the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPPC), which oversaw the investigation by the Metropolitan police, wasn't convinced. In a report sent to the Pope family, it concluded that the CCTV footage was inconclusive; and that while the officers may have changed their accounts when they saw the footage in court, that was only because it jogged their memory.

As for the threat "Don't worry we'll get them next time", the officer was apparently talking about it being her turn to buy the coffees!

Fist up

EYEBROWS were raised when PC Neil Latteman, 43, was cleared by Bow Street magistrates of assaulting a pro-hunt demonstrator.

Not only had he been seen and filmed, but he had even admitted punching 34-year-old Mark Faulkner in the face after Faulkner had been arrested and was up against a police van surrounded by eight or nine other officers.

Latteman maintained that he was acting to assist in the arrest and had used an approved technique to stun struggling suspects. District judge Timothy Workman said he couldn't be sure that Latteman was "lying when giving his evidence that he was acting lawfully in striking Mr Faulkner".

The *Eye* asked to see the police training manual for this disabling technique. It is apparently called a brachial strike and officers are told: "Use verbal commands as appropriate, then from a defensive stance, having blocked the attack, step towards the assailant, and strike midway across the side of the neck (brachial plexus origin) with the broader side of the wrist or forearm. Alternatively strike with the inside of the wrist or forearm to the opposite side of the neck."

Nowhere does it say use a clenched fist in the face.

In the City

WHAT may be the final shabby chapter in the shameful saga of one of the greatest regulatory failures in recent British financial history – the 1982 collapse of the Savings & Investment Bank – has recently been concluded on terms which have done nothing to help the 4,000 victims of the crash.

Seven years after liquidators of the Manx bank began litigation against one of those whose over-generous loans from SIB helped to bring the bank down, the legal proceedings have ended with a pyrrhic settlement worth less than the legal costs incurred.

Property developer Kenneth Fincken has paid around £225,000 to settle claims that he failed to fully disclose his assets when reaching an earlier £1m deal with the SIB liquidators in 1992. But after three trips to the appeal court and innumerable other court hearings, the legal bill is estimated at £500,000 so the outcome will produce not a penny for the creditors, many of whom are elderly former depositors who lost their life savings.

However, for the lawyers on both sides – Fincken too, or more likely perhaps companies where he is a director, had to meet similar substantial costs – the exercise has been a big earner. Further proof, as in the case of Equitable Life, that while the courts may deliver justice, it is often more by accident while the lawyers by design always win.

Fincken and his partner, the now dead convicted fraudster and bankrupt Michael Morris, as well as companies they controlled owed SIB £13m at the time the bank collapsed with debts of £42m. A subsequent official report to the Manx government described the relationship between Morris and SIB as "disastrous" and a "major factor" in the collapse. The report concluded that Morris had bribed the SIB managing director Robert Killin.

How else to explain why Morris and Fincken were loaned a further £3.8m which did not have to be repaid for five to ten years at a time when they were in default on earlier loans? A decision described in the report unsurprisingly as "remarkable". Or that SIB had agreed that certain loans did not have to be repaid for 13 years? (The trial of Killin and others collapsed in 1990 largely due to the delays in bringing the prosecution by the Manx authorities.)

It took six years for the SIB liquidators, accountants Michael Jordan and Tim Beer, to be in a position to commence action against Morris and Fincken for recovery of what eventually totalled £19m including interest. It took another four years for a settlement to be reached under which both men handed over some £1m each after selling their substantial family homes.

Fincken first entered into a deed of settlement in October 1988 but defaulted on the agreement. In July 1990 he entered into a second deed of settlement but again defaulted. So in April 1991 SIB began bankruptcy proceedings. These were dismissed on technical grounds. SIB appealed this ruling. In return for the bankruptcy proceedings being dropped, Fincken entered into a third deed of settlement in May 1992. As part of this arrangement Fincken declared that he had made a full disclosure of his worldwide assets and had paid all he could afford. So the liquidators' £19m claim was settled for just £2m.

Fincken was now free to continue his business career. Despite the post-SIB collapse of the companies he ran with Morris (British Anzani and Medway Secondary Metals, subject to unpublished and inconclusive investigations by the Department of Timidity & Inaction living down to its reputation), Fincken surfaced in buildings material group Pyrok Holdings and Westminster Property Holdings. Both went into liquidation.

Undeterred Fincken became involved in a new property venture, North West Estates. He also continued to live in some style in Buckinghamshire. North West Estates is

"This is Bob Wallace, head of corporate hospitality"

controlled from the British Virgin Islands tax haven by First Security Holdings. It is assumed that behind the BVI veil is a Fincken-linked family trust.

By 1998 while the SIB victims had been paid 27p in the £ by the liquidators plus a maximum £5,000 from the totally culpable Manx government, it was very much business as usual for Fincken.

However, that year the liquidators received information which suggested that at the time of the settlement five years before Fincken could have controlled assets worth up to £12m which had not been disclosed. These were linked to trusts, companies and bank accounts in Guernsey and Switzerland as well as the BVI. Closer to home were a barn and some expensive shotguns. Persuaded that Fincken was in breach of his 1992 agreement, the liquidators launched a new legal action to recover these assets or the balance of the £19m.

Sadly for the SIB victims it proved impossible to confirm that Fincken had owned most of these assets at the time of the 1992 agreement – that timing was crucial. So they were left with the barn, said to be worth maybe £350,000, and possibly Boss shotguns worth maybe over £20,000 – with interest over £400,000.

By 2002, after two trips to the court of appeal, SIB appeared to be in sight of victory, especially after an admission said to have been made by Fincken. But then in November 2003 the appeal court ruled that the admission could not be used because it had been made at a "without prejudice" meeting. "Without prejudice' is the legal invisible ink that allows settlement offers to be made that cannot be referred to publicly.

This weakened the SIB case which was due to go to trial in early 2004 and encouraged efforts at a settlement. But once again Fincken led the liquidators a not so merry if legal dance.

In January 2004, apparently desperate to get a deal at almost any price after spending so much on legal costs, the liquidators entered into a remarkable arrangement with Fincken. He handed over two cheques post-dated to December for £250,000 and £150,000. In return the liquidators dropped their action over the barn and the guns worth £400,000, never mind the £19m plus interest since 1992.

Furthermore, the terms of the settlement meant that if Fincken failed to honour the agreement, SIB could now only sue for the value of the two cheques, £400,000. It had effectively waived goodbye to the £19m claim covering the agreement Fincken had signed in 1992.

The second cheque was supposed to provide security for payment of the £250,000. Fearing that neither cheque would be met on the due date, the liquidators in November 2004 instead agreed to accept an offer of £250,000 from an upcoming property deal instead of trying to cash the cheques for £400,000.

By early 2005 Fincken had still only handed over £125,000 while continuing to promise payment. Faced with the unattractive choices of spending more money and years trying again to bankrupt Fincken or suing if the £150,000 cheque, which had been retained, was bounced, the liquidators decided there was little alternative but to wait. Eventually a total of £225,000 was handed over by Fincken.

Since 1982 the SIB victims have received 33p in the £ from the liquidation adding up to £9m. As at the last report to creditors in 2000, legal and liquidators' fees and expenses were already almost as much. The last five-year battle with Kenneth Fincken will ensure that those fees and expenses will now exceed the return to creditors. As one of those closely involved in the proceedings remarked bitterly: "Only the lawyers have won." So what else is new?

PENSIONERS and policyholders in Equitable Life would be forgiven for having similar uncharitable thoughts after the humiliating climbdown by chairman Vanni Treves and his co-directors in walking away from the legal action against former auditor, Ernst & Young.

After first abandoning the £1.3bn "lost sale" claim, Equitable last week accepted the inevitable and dropped the £700m negligence claim against the auditor for failing to warn against the

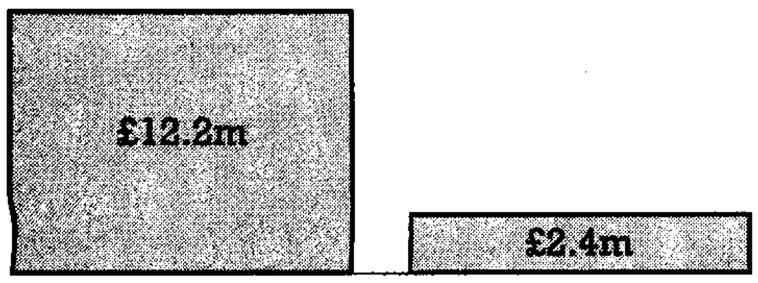
THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
DEMOGRAPHICS SYMPOSIUM
THE STATE OF PENSIONS
THERE'S ONLY ONE ANSWER TO THE PENSIONS CRISIS...
OUR EMPLOYEES WILL JUST HAVE TO WORK LONGER...
...TO KEEP US IN OUR OLD AGE!

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Elton John's smart City move

John, with business partners Frank Presland and Keith Bradley, sold out five months ago to music management company Sanctuary – and immediately dumped the stock...



...What investors paid Sir Elton & pals for the shares

...What those shares are worth today

guaranteed annuity time bomb which all but blew the company away.

Equitable now faces a legal bill for its own costs of £20-30m. It would be surprising if Equitable did not try to persuade E&Y, which will also pay its own costs, to agree to a confidential settlement to save face. But if so E&Y would have had no reason to agree to such terms and it was in the box seats.

In what seems little more than a face saving gesture Equitable is pressing on with its £1.7m claim against 15 former directors. How that can be justified seems hard to understand given that the former directors' assets are well short of such a colossal number and it is understood that their insurance has already been exhausted by the legal costs of defending the action. That claim too seems set for settlement before too much more money is spent in court.

Those who followed the case suspect that the main reason for bringing the claim against the directors anyway was to ensure that they did not give evidence for Ernst & Young rather than to collect substantial sums. Only one non-executive director can be described as a millionaire. Perhaps Equitable intends to seize part of the former executives' pensions?

In fact the former directors' evidence was another Equitable own goal. It helped E&Y by completely undermining the "lost sale" claim confirming that the directors would not have acted any differently if the auditors had warned them about the guaranteed annuity problem!

However, what about the legal advice which the confident Treves trumpeted declared Equitable had a "high likelihood of success against Ernst & Young"? Will Equitable now consider the options of action against lawyers Herbert Smith and Iain Milligan QC for bad advice?

Treves, himself a lawyer, claimed that advice had convinced him to sue the former auditors on the basis of the answers to just three questions. Maybe Equitable should be suing him for negligence?

After this resounding triumph Treves intends to step down next year. Equitable policyholders would no doubt like him to go sooner. Especially as it is likely that Ernst & Young, despite seeing off Equitable, could still find itself on the losing end of the regulatory proceedings brought against the firm and some of its partners over the Equitable audits by the accountants' Joint Disciplinary Scheme. That finding is expected next year. The JDS tribunal was postponed to allow Equitable to have first pop.

Any critical finding over the Equitable audits will make even more humiliating the decision to walk away from the £700m negligence claim after spending more than £20m. Vanni Treves will no doubt be hoping any finding against E&Y comes after he leaves so he does not have to apologise twice.

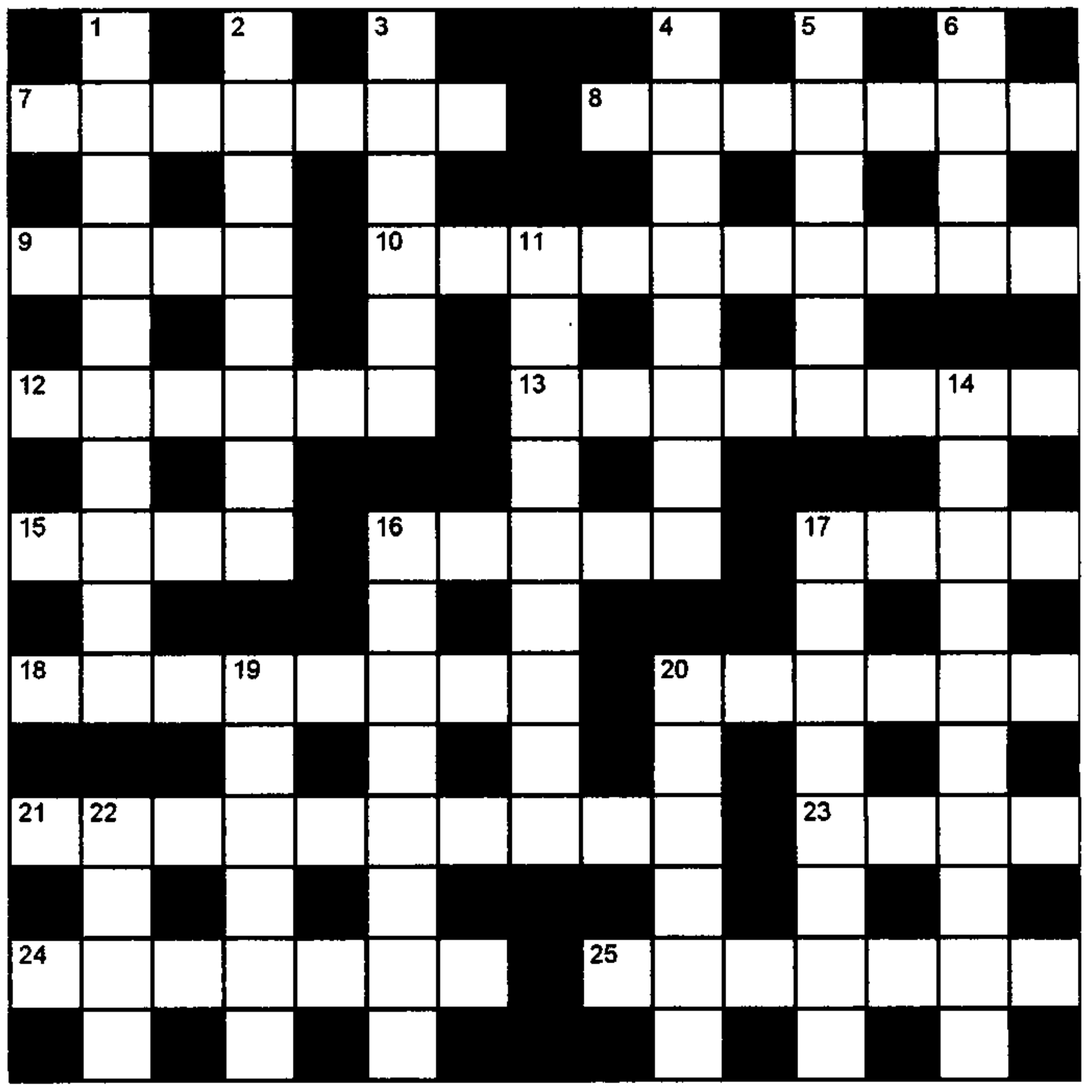
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 297

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 7 October 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7/20ac. This wobbly behind does one's head in – stupid (4-3-6)

8 Harry inserts rounded file in the butt (7)

9 Look round before getting leg over (4)

10 Queen's rather common consort? Unhealthy occupation (5,5)

12 Where you shut your eyes to FBI surveillance? Sucker! (3,3)

13 Prince: "Mater has not quite finished tipping glass of piss over one" (8)

15 Prick gives up drug, has an E, another name for the drug (4)

16 Peg riding a Page 3 girl? (3-2)

17 Corporations backing filth (4)

18 Celeb stalked by Ray, possibly a crawler in the main (8)

20 See 7

21 Dick penetrated by old, excited peasant (10)

23 Kay takes off top (4)

24 Tories failed to get this popular energy (2,5)

25 Rude and clumsy Johnson squeezes ball, hard (7)

DOWN

1 Tired as a carpet no longer fashionable (7,3)

2 Getting the collywobbles, key NI politician trades one for an E (8)

3 Despicable type, one of ten joining Sun, say (6)

4 Caught unawares "making a contribution to" Lamont, he hoped (2,3,3)

5 Tatty rag much used by drivers (6)

6 PC name for Blair's number two in school (4)

11 The art of being on top, having sex with another bloke's cool (9)

14 One on the lookout for dirt, note, goes round dodgy urinals (10)

16 Senior pisspoor in the art of spin – timeserver (8)

17 Viewers intent on taking in Kirsty's top, exposed (8)

19 The very latest he'd jiggled balls outside (3-3)

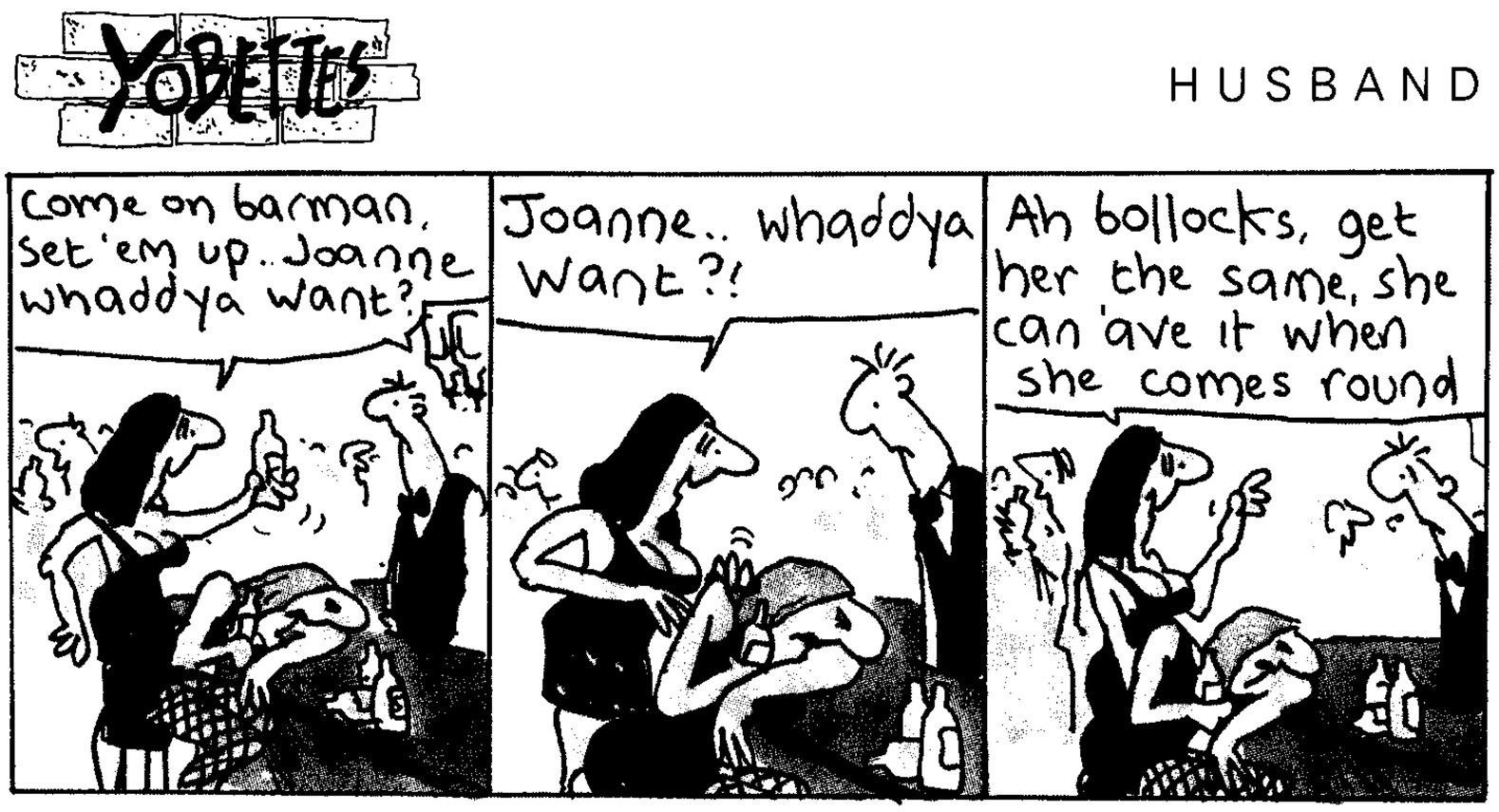
20 Act like rabbits and go in for frottage up on the range (6)

22 Connect live one to end of Jonathan King (4)

Crossword 296 winner: BARRY FLEMING

ACROSS: 1 Camp it up 6 Skopje 9 Chaste 10 Laid back 11 Snot 12 Stuff 13 Twee 14/16/28 Talking a load of bollocks 18 Puerile 20 Piss off 22 Stub 24 X-rays 26 Hiya 29 Ad libs 30 Odds-on 31 Press box.

DOWN: 2 Ashen 3 Piss-taker 4 Treason 5 Pilau 6 Skinful 7 Orbit 8 Jacked off 15 Adulthood 17 Arseholes 19 Lexicon 21 In state 23 Balls 25 Aesop 27 Yobbo.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Joanne.. whaddya want?!
Ah bollocks, get her the same, she can 'ave it when she comes round

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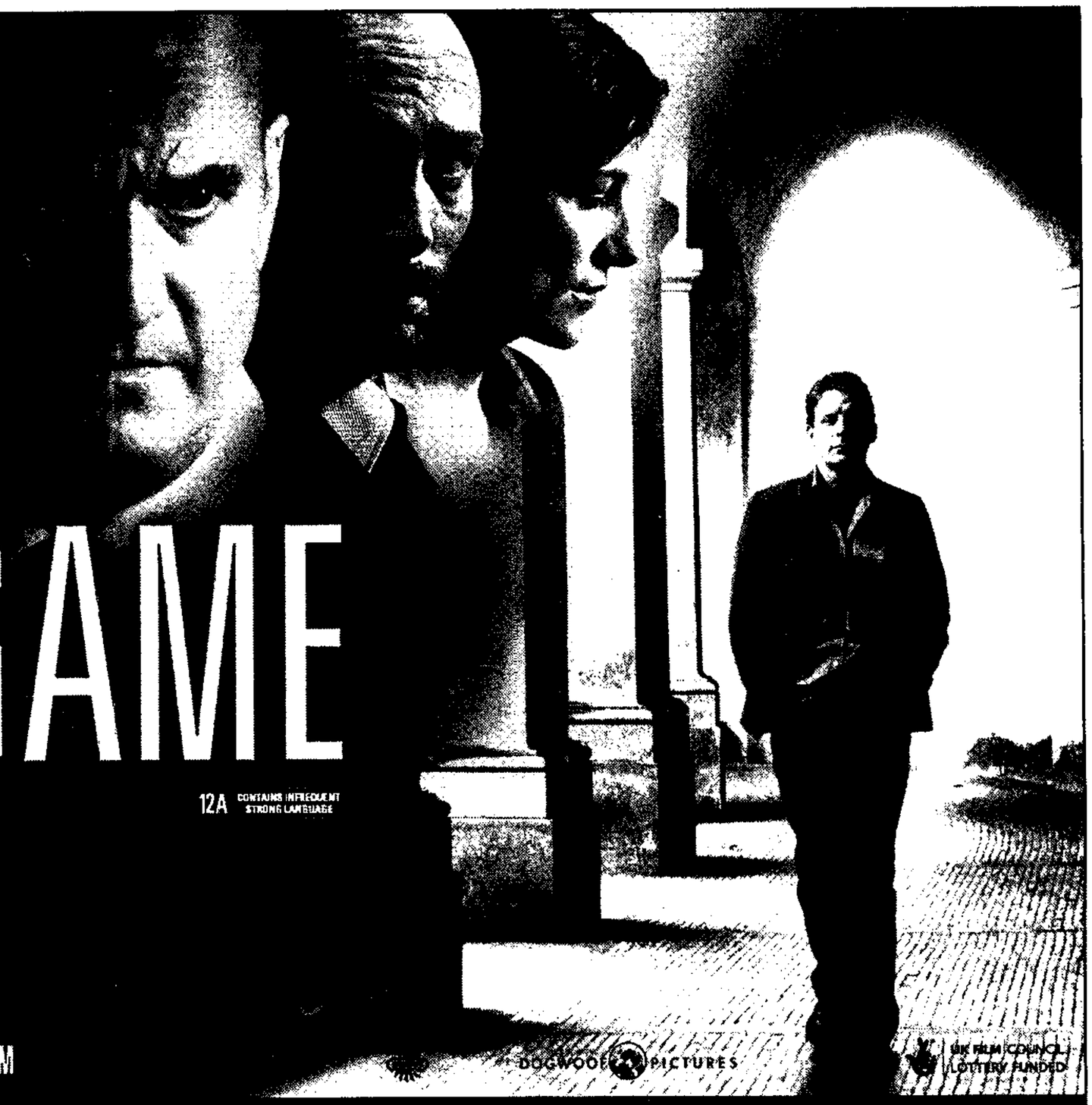

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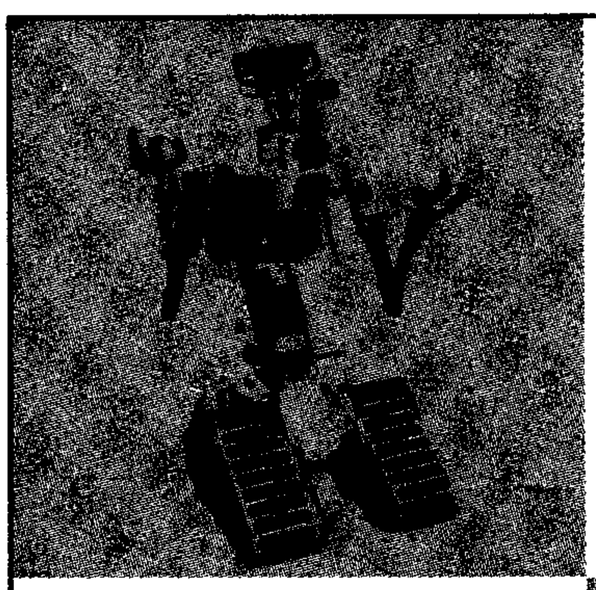
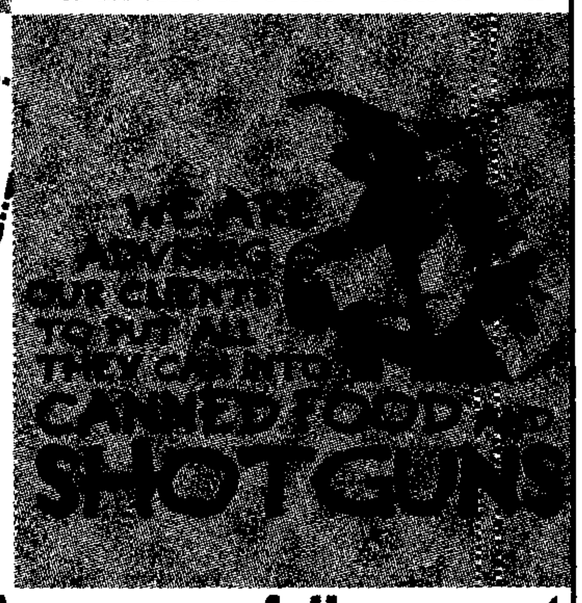


WORD UP!

Bliar



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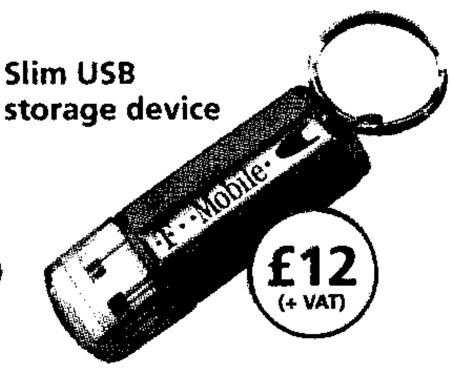

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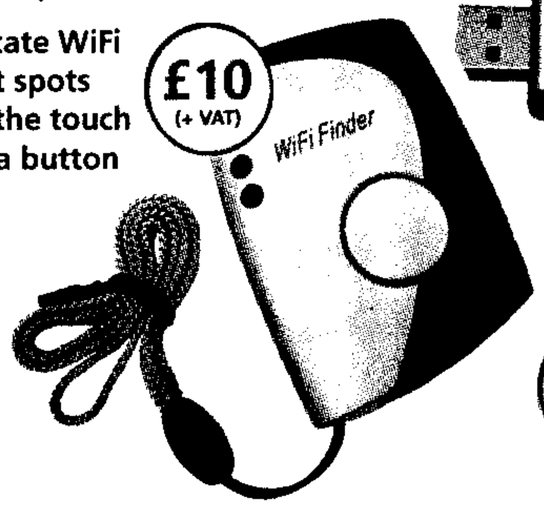

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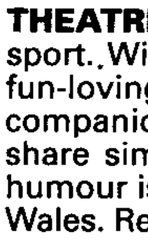

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I NEED A £10K short-term loan to secure home and then take on my employer who has been poisoning me. Money will be returned. Thanks. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-98-13. A/C: 00007715. Info: cr.herd@ntlworld.com

FUNDRAISING FOR WHEELCHAIRS for disabled kids by climbing Kilimanjaro. Need £3000+ to overcome own gut-wrenching vertigo. Everything appreciated. S/C: 30-18-83. A/C: 10568560.

RELOCATED TO COMPLETE TRAINING. No public transport, need car, single with dependents. No help from their dad. Please help. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 42981724.

PSYCHIC HEALER needs help to help others. Blessings. S/C: 11-04-57. A/C: 01242024.

FREE STUDIO/FLAT in London wanted by young opera singer. Excellent references. Contact 07932 047 836.

PROSTATE CANCER has taken my beloved father. Need help to support mum and myself. Any donations gratefully accepted. S/C: 40-38-21. A/C: 01176307.

DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES, lady desperately needs financial help. S/C: 20-19-95. A/C: 80669741. Thank you!

STUDENT: I need £6K for fees and accommodation before the end of October. Bank won't lend. HELP! hb2001@gmail.com S/C: 40-61-99. A/C: 17329149.

BRILLIANT PhD STUDENT, drowning in £40K debts. Desperate. You could save my life and career. Nationwide, S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 57204986.

£600 PCM FOR POPULAR, struggling radio enterprise. Contact: promotions@pipelineradio.org

TOUGH, DEPRIVED BACKGROUND, seeking funding / patrons for MA top Uni. S/C: 30-25-80. A/C: 00856010. vpoorgirl@yahoo.co.uk

SOCIAL WORKERS SPLIT FAMILY. Trying to rebuild social life. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 62268621.

THIRTY SOMETHING starting over studying medicine, any help appreciated, SC: 08-92-73. AC: 88075044.

BOY, 11, IQ142, almost illiterate, needs funding for dyslexia education to save self-respect / sanity. S/C: 30-00-01. A/C: 07449146.

HELP ME PLEASE, DESPERATE, £6,000 needed to clear debt. Many thanks. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-97-41. A/C 13588168.

BIG DEBT, NO MONEY, want freedom, £50,000. CoOp, S/C: 08-93-00. A/C: 01070712. PLEASE HELP.

ABANDONED with year-old son by adulterous wife without warning. Child custody secured but at great financial cost. Need £8,950 to secure family home. Desperate. Any donations gratefully received. HSBC, S/C: 40-35-34. A/C: 11672525.

SMALL MUSIC SCHOOL requires use of grand / upright piano for concert / teaching - supervised use only, by budding musicians. olivia.bevan@ntlworld.com. Tel: 01525 853 015.

SAILING IN DEEP WATER with pirates circling. Any help gratefully received. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 113344811. Thanks.

YOUNG/F INTELLECT and musician desperately seeks funds for tuition and supporting a band. Loco fidem meam in dominibus . . . All amounts greatly appreciated. S/C: 40-02-03. A/C: 91495488.

HELP! £20K NEEDED to avoid bankruptcy, maintain sanity, life would be sweet! Anything appreciated. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 80859601.

BUSINESS ANGEL/S required to help us complete our gym redevelopment in Sussex! Sound opportunity and good ROI! £300K required, £150K already invested, 730 members – help us finish our vision – Peter: 01273 608 444.

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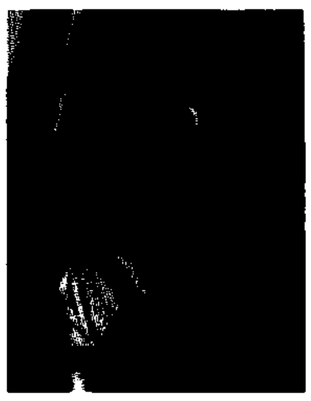

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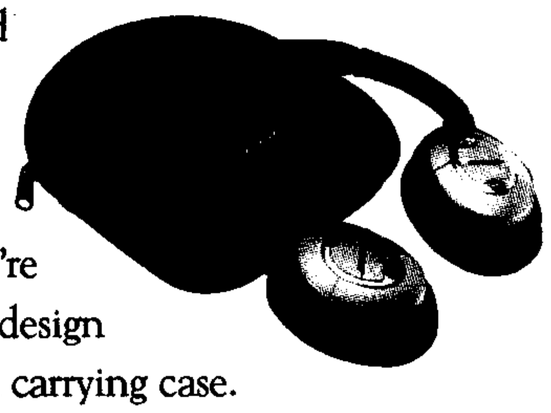

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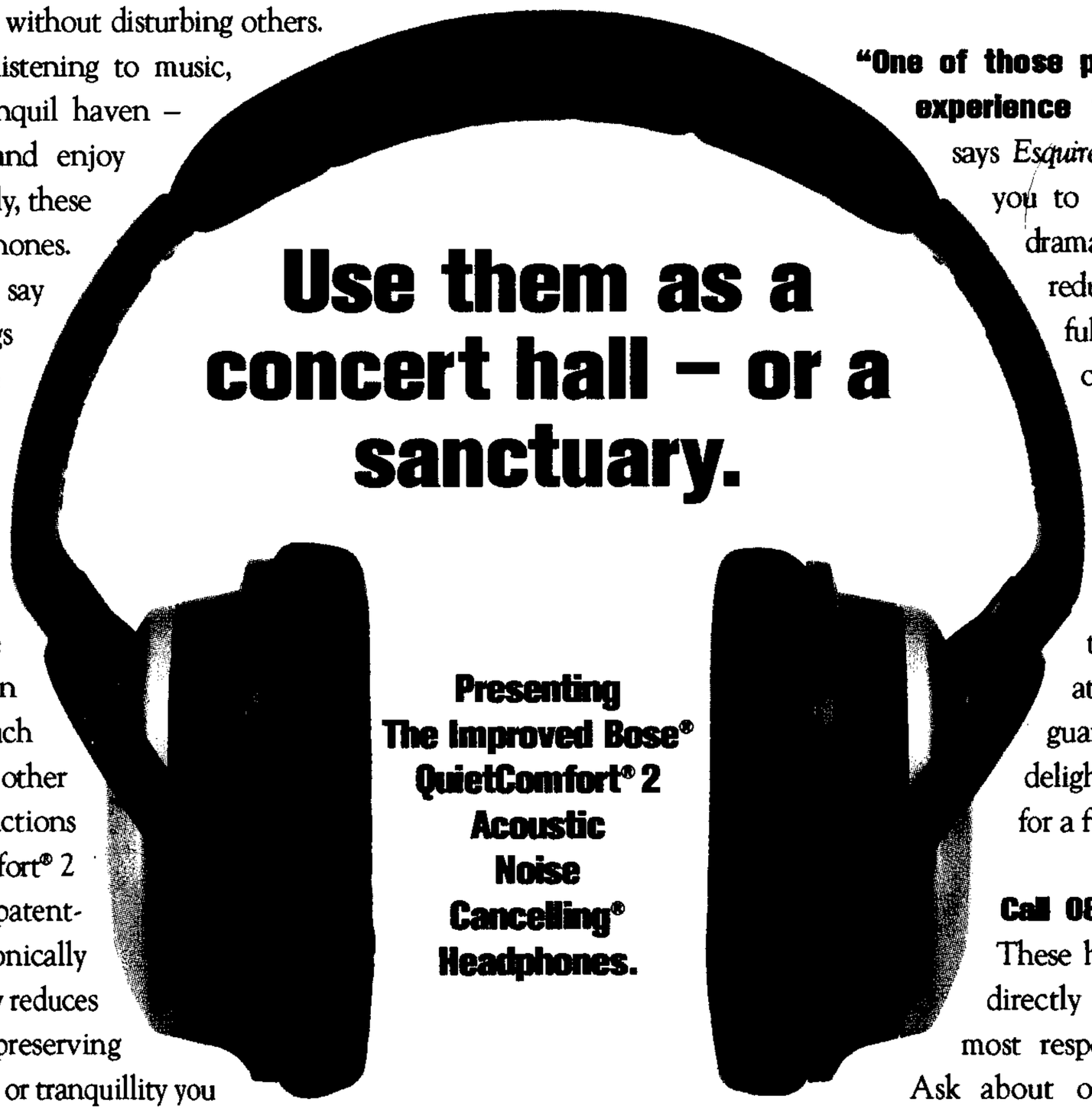
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